

SAINT PAULS.

JULY, 1870.

THE THREE BROTHERS.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BEN.

THE first who arrived of the family party was the eldest son.

It was on the 15th of September that Ben came home. The day appointed for reading the will was a week later, and neither of the others had arrived when Ben's letter came announcing his return for the next morning. Fortunately, the "boys'" rooms were quite ready, and the house was so wound up to the height of excitement, that the first actual arrival was a godsend. The flutter and commotion of that day was indescribable. As for poor Mary she did not know what she was about. It was cruel on her that he should come alone,—that there should be nobody to break their inevitable tête-à-tête at breakfast and during the hours in which Mrs. Renton would certainly be invisible. Busy as she was, looking after everything, she found time for a hurried note to Laurie, telling him of his brother's coming. "He has been so long away that I feel as if it was a stranger who was coming," Mary wrote, in a panic quite unlike her usual character;—"do come at once and help me to entertain him." "Help you to entertain Ben!" was Laurie's reply, with ever so many notes of interrogation. Perhaps the helplessness and fright which were visible in this demand gave some light to Laurie upon the state of affairs, but he either could not or would not help her in her trouble; and with a heart which beat very loudly in her breast, but with an outward aspect of the most elaborate quietness and composure, Mary stood on the lawn in the September sunset watching for the dog-cart to come from the station. The ladies from The Willows had been calling that very morning, and of course had heard what was going to happen, and a glance had passed between the mother and daughter when Mrs. Renton had hoped she would see a great deal of them.

while the boys were at home. "I should think Mr. Renton must have forgotten us," Millicent had said, with a little pathos. Mary took very little part in all this, but noted everything, the most vigilant and clear-sighted of critics. It made her heart ache to look at that beautiful face. Was it possible that those blue eyes which looked so lustrous, and the smiling lips that were so sweet, could obliterate in Ben's mind all sense of falsehood and treachery? And, indeed, Mary only took the treachery for granted. Perhaps there had been nothing of the kind; perhaps he was coming without any grievance against her to fall into this syren's snares. How cunning it was of her to post herself there, on the edge of the river, where "the boys'" boats would be passing continually, and where they could not escape her! And how deep-rooted the plan must have been which preserved the date for seven years, and made Millicent aware exactly when her victim would be once more at home! Mary's thoughts were severe and uncompromising. She could not think of any possible tie between Millicent and her cousin but that of enchantress and victim. She did not know how good the adventuress had resolved to be if this last scheme of all should be successful; nor what a weary life of failure, and disappointment, and self-disgust poor Millicent had gone through. Mary could not have believed in any extenuating circumstances. There could be no trace of womanly or natural feeling in the creature who thus came, visibly without the shadow of a pretext, to lie in wait for Ben.

She thought her heart would have stopped beating when the dog-cart dashed in at the gates; but her outward aspect was one of such fixed composure that Ben, as he made a spring out of it, almost without giving the horse time to stop, and caught his cousin precipitately in his arms, felt as if he had committed a social sin in his sudden kiss. "I am sure I beg your pardon, Mary," he cried, half laughing, half horrified. "I forgot I had been away so long, and you had grown out of acquaintance with me; but still you need not look so shocked."

"I am not shocked," said Mary, who had scarcely voice enough to speak; "it was only the surprise; and, good heavens, what a beard!"

"Well, yes, it is an alarming article, I suppose," said Ben, looking down with complacency upon one of those natural ornaments which men prize so much. It was an altogether new decoration. And it seemed to Mary that he had grown even taller while he had been away, so changed was the development of the mature man,—brown, bearded, and powerful,—from that of Ben, the young man of fashion, who had been as dainty in all his ways as herself. His frame had broadened, expanded, and acquired that air of activity and force which only occupation gives. His eye had no languor in it, but was full of active observation and thought. The change was so great

that it took away her breath, and after the second glance Mary was not quite sure that it was satisfactory. He was more like the Rentons than he had been,—his lip curled a little at the corner, as if it might sneer on occasion. His manner had grown a little peremptory. "Where is my mother?" he said immediately, without giving even a spare moment to look again at the companion of his childhood;—"in her own room?"

"Yes, she is waiting for you," said Mary. And he went off from her without another word. Of course it was very right he should do so, after an absence of six years and a half, and very nice of him to be so anxious to see his mother. But yet——! Mary went in after him, in two or three minutes, feeling somehow as if she had fallen from an unspeakable height of expectation; though she had not expected anything in reality,—and Ben had been very kind, very frank and cordial, and cousinly. What a fool she was! And while she could hear the unusual roll of the man's voice in Mrs. Renton's room, running on in perpetual volleys of sound, Mary, in the silence of her own, sat down and cried,—folly for which she could have killed herself. Of course, his first hour belonged to his mother. And what did she, Mary, want of him but his kindly regard, and,—esteem,—and,—respect! Respect was what a man would naturally give,—if she did not betray herself, and show how little she was deserving of it,—to a woman of her years. Seven-and-twenty! To be sure Ben was nearly five years older; but that does not count in a man. Moved by these thoughts, Mary went to the extreme of voluntary humility, and dressed herself in one of her soberest dresses for dinner. "I laid out the pink, ma'am, as Mr. Ben has come home," said her maid. "No, the grey," said Mary, obstinately. He should see at least that there was no affectation of juvenility about her,—that she fully acknowledged and understood her position as,—almost,—middle-aged. Poor Mary was considered a very sensible girl by all her friends, and she thought to herself, while committing this piece of folly, that she would justify their opinion;—sense as her grand quality, and esteem and respect as the mild emotions which she might hope to inspire,—such were the reflections that passed through Mary Westbury's mind as she put on her grey gown.

"It don't look so bad, Miss Mary, after all," said her maid encouragingly, as she gave the last twitch to the skirt. And certainly it did not look bad. The sensible young woman who wished her cousin Ben to respect her, had a little rose-flush going and coming on her cheeks, and a lucid gleam of emotion in her eyes which might have justified a more marked sentiment. Her hand was a little tremulous, her voice apt,—if the expression is permissible,—to go into chords, the keys of half-a-dozen different feelings being struck at the same moment, and producing, if a little incoherence, at the same time a curious multiplicity of tone. The dining-room had more

lights than usual, but still was not bright; and when Ben came in with his mother on his arm, he protested instantly against the great desert of a table, which, in deference to old custom, was always spread in the long-deserted place.

"I can't have you half a mile off," he said. "You must sit by me here, mamma, and you here, Mary. That is better. We are not supposed to be on our best behaviour, I hope, the very day I come home."

"Why, this is very nice," said Mrs. Renton, as she sipped her soup at her son's right hand, and stopped from time to time to look at him. "And one does not feel as if one had any responsibility. I think I shall keep this seat, my dear; it will be like dining out without any of the trouble. And then, Ben, I shall not feel the change when you bring home a wife."

Mary, who had been looking on, suddenly turned her eyes away; but all the same, she perceived that Ben's obstinate Renton upper lip settled down a little, and that he grew stern to behold. "I don't think that is a very likely event," he said.

"But it must be," said Mrs. Renton; "it must be some time. I don't say directly, because this is very pleasant. And after being left seven years all alone, I think I might have my boy to myself to cheer me up a little. But it must be some time,—in a year or two,—when you have had time to look about you and make up your mind."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," said Ben with a short laugh. "If I am to judge of my effect upon English ladies by the impression I made on Mary, it is not encouraging, I can tell you. I was afraid she would faint."

"Oh, Ben!" Mary exclaimed, looking up at him with her lucid, emotional eyes; and the rose-flush went over all her face. It was a very pleasant face to look at. And, perhaps, even beauty herself is not more attractive than a countenance which changes when you look at it, and a voice full of chords. Yes; no doubt he had some respect for her, and even esteem, if you went so far as that.

"Mary and I have been living so much out of the world," said Mrs. Renton. "We have been quite alone, you know, my dear. My poor health was never equal to the exertion. It is always best for such an invalid as I am to give up everything, I believe. And except just our drives,—your poor dear papa always made such a point of my drives."

"But Mary was not an invalid," said Ben, and he looked full at her for a moment, lighting up once more the glow in her face. "I don't know what you have been doing to yourself," he said. "Is it the way she has her hair, mother? It cannot be her dress, because I remember that gown. I suppose she has been asleep all these seven years, like the beauty in the wood."

"I think I have," said Mary; but her voice was scarcely audible. After all, the pink gown had not been necessary, and virtue had its reward.

"Asleep for seven years? Indeed, you are unkind to Mary," said Mrs. Renton. "You can't think what a comfort she has been to me, Ben. She has always read to me, and driven with me, and talked when I could bear it, and got my worsted work straight, and given the housekeeper her orders. If she had been my own child she could not have been nicer. And never cared for going out or anything. I am sure it is not necessary for me to say it; but if anything should happen to me, I hope you will all be very kind to Mary. You can't think what a good child she has been."

"Kind to Mary!" said Ben, holding out his hand to her. Well, perhaps there might be something more than even respect and esteem;—affection,—that was the word;—family affection and brotherly kindness. And what could a woman of seven-and-twenty desire or dream of more?

And when they retired to the drawing-room Mrs. Renton was very eloquent about the change of affairs. "Not to say that it is Ben, my dear,—whom of course it is a great happiness to see again,—there is always a pleasure in knowing that there is a man in the house," she said. "It rouses one up. I am sure there were many days that it was a great bore to go down to dinner. I should have liked a cup of tea in my own room so much better; but a man must always have his dinner. And then they have been about all day, and they have something to tell you, if it is only what is in the evening paper;—and there is always most news in the evening paper, Mary. I have remarked that all my life. And even now, you know, one feels that he will come in by-and-by,—and that is something to look forward to. It is a great advantage, my dear, to have a man in the house."

"It is very pleasant, at least, to have Ben in the house," said Mary; but she quaked a little while she spoke; for what was she to do with him for the rest of the evening after Mrs. Renton went to bed? And if the world were coming to an end it would not prevent Davison's appearance at half-past nine to take her mistress up-stairs. And there was not much chance that Ben would be inclined for bed at that early hour. Mary tried hard to brace herself up for the evening's work, as she made the tea, pondering whether she might retire in her turn about half-past ten or so, that being a proper young ladies' hour,—though with Laurie she would not have minded how long she sat talking, or letting him talk. And yet Ben had been seeing more, doing more, and had more to tell than Laurie. Thus it sometimes happens that the greater the love the less is the kindness,—though such a word as love had not been breathed in the inmost recesses of Mary Westbury's mind.

But when Ben joined them he was very talkative, and full of his own concerns, and was so interesting that his mother put Davison off, and it was ten o'clock before she actually left the drawing-room. After a little conflict with herself Mary prepared to follow. She would have liked to stay, but felt herself awkward and uncomfortable, and full of a thousand hesitations.

"Are you going too?" Ben said, as he saw her gathering up her work; and there was a tone of disappointment in his voice that went to her heart.

"I thought you might be tired," she said, faltering.

"Tired! the first night at home! I suppose the poor dear mother has stayed as long as is good for her; but you are not an invalid, Mary," said Ben; "you don't mean to say ten o'clock is the end of the evening for you? And I have a hundred things to tell you, and to ask you. Put on your shawl, and come out for a breath of fresh air. The moon always shines at Renton. I'll ring for somebody to bring you a shawl."

"I'll run and get one," said Mary; and she stayed up-stairs for a few moments to take breath and compose herself. It was very silly of her, of course, to be excited; but she reflected that it was not simply the innocent stroll with her cousin in the moonlight of which she was afraid, but the possibility of a return to the subject of Millicent, of which he had spoken to her last time he was at Renton. He was standing outside the window, waiting for her, when she came down, and they wandered away together, instinctively taking that path towards the river. So many moonlight walks on that same path glanced over Mary's memory as they walked,—childish ones, when the cousins played hide and seek behind the great, smooth, shining boles of the beeches,—merry comings-home from water-parties when they were all boys and girls together! And then that walk, which was the last she had taken with Ben!

He did not say much for some minutes. Perhaps he, too, was thinking of all those old recollections. "When I went away the moon was shining," he said at last abruptly, "and I suppose it has been shining and the river running and the branches rustling all this time. How strange it seems! I wonder if I have been dreaming all these seven years?"

"I dare say you have for a great part of the time," Mary said, with an effort to be playful. "I am sure I have at least."

"I hope so, considering my mother's account of what you have been doing," said Ben. And then he made a pause, and said, as if he did it on purpose to stir up every possibility of discomfort in her, "Do you remember our last talk here?"

"Yes," said Mary; and then they went on, stumbling in the dark places, and now and then coming out like ghosts,—two weird figures,—into the silver light. Though he had brought her out on the

pretence of having so much to say, in reality he scarcely talked at all. And she kept by his side, with her heart giving irregular thumps against her breast. She had not breath enough to bid him not to go any farther, and the sound of her own footsteps and his in the utter stillness seemed to wake all kinds of curious echoes in the dark wood. Mary was half frightened, and yet rapt into a curious mysterious exaltation of feeling. What was he thinking of? Were they two the same creatures who had come down that same path together,—was it six years or six hours ago? The darkness among the trees around was not more profound than was the darkness in which Ben's life had been enveloped during his absence. He had written home, it is true, and they had known where he went and what, as people say, he was doing, all the time; but of his real existence Mary knew as little,—just as little and as much, as he of hers. Thus they went on, until they came to the opening, and the green bank upon the river-side, which lay in a flood of moonlight all shut and bounded round by the blackness of the woods.

"What a pity there is no boat," said Ben. "I might have taken you up the reach as far as the moonlight goes. We must have a boat. I did not think it was so sweet. And there is Cookesley Church across the fields. I remember so well looking at it the last time through the branches of the big beech. How high the river is! Whose boat is that, I wonder, on the other side?"

"Oh, it is from The Willows, I suppose," said Mary with a kind of desperation.

"The Willows? That is something new. Is it old Peters and his sister? But you told me he was dead. What sort of people are at The Willows now?"

"Two ladies," said Mary, succinctly. Was not this like the very hand of fate? Why The Willows should thus thrust itself quite arbitrarily into the conversation without any word or warning she could not tell. It was like the work of a malicious spirit.

"Two ladies!" said Ben. "You are very terse,—terser than I ever knew you. And who may the two ladies be who venture on the river in the moonlight?"

"Oh, I do not think they are in the boat."

"But whether they are in the boat or not, who are they?" said Ben, and there was a sound as of laughter in his voice.

Then there followed a dead pause. The boat lay in the fullest moonlight, and already they could hear the soft splash of the oars and distant sound of voices. It was not coming down the stream, but floating softly on the silvered water, just kept in its place against the current by the oars. Some one was out enjoying the beauty of the night in that magical fashion; and opposite were visible the little margin of lawn which belonged to The Willows, the trees dripping into the water, and the lights in the open windows. A subtle

suggestion of happiness, and love, and rest was in the scene. Was it a pair of lovers, or a young husband with his wife, or——?

"Tell me,—this becomes mysterious,—who are they?" said Ben.

"Oh, only some people," Mary said, with some breathlessness, "whom I think you once knew. Do you remember speaking to me, the last time we came down here together, about,—some one,—a school-fellow of mine?"

"Yes."

"It is a very strange coincidence," Mary said, with a miserable attempt at a laugh. "It is Millicent, who has gone there with her mother for the summer. We are neighbours now."

And then silence came again,—silence deeper than before. He started a little, that it was easy to see; but his face was quite in the shade. And after a while he said, with a steady and decided voice, "You mean Mrs. Henry Rich?"

"Yes," said Mary; and then they both stood on the rustling grass and watched the boat, which lay caught, as it were, and suspended in the blaze of white radiance. No doubt she was there, enjoying that beautiful moment, not thinking what silent spectators were looking on so near. As for Mary, she stood spell-bound, and gazed, full of a thousand thoughts. Since her cousins had been gone, Mary had had no one to row her about the shining river, every turn of which she knew so well; but Millicent had her boatman at once. And who was he? And what could Ben be thinking of that he stood thus on the brink of the full stream, filled more than full by the overflowing of the moonlight? All at once he turned on his heel, as if rousing himself, and drew Mary's hand within his arm.

"Let me help you up the bank," said Ben. "After all, the night grows cold. Have you ever walked as far before, so late as this?"

"Never, I think," said Mary, going with him up the hill at a pace very unusual to her. Though he carried on some pretence at conversation, she was too breathless with the rapid ascent to answer otherwise than by an occasional monosyllable. But when they reached the great beech he permitted her to breathe. Perhaps he paused there only from habit, or perhaps he was curious to look back upon that picture on the river, and gain another glimpse in this strange, unlooked-for, unsuspected way into the life of the woman he had once loved. The boat had disappeared while they were mounting the bank, and on the lawn, before The Willows, stood a white figure, dwarfed by distance into the size of a fairy, but blazing white in the intense moonlight. No doubt Ben saw her, for his face was turned that way; but he went on again without a word. It was only when they had reached the lawn, and were approaching the lights and the open window by which they had come forth, that he alluded to what he had seen. Then he asked sharply, all at once, in the very middle

of some other subject which had nothing to do with it, "How long have these people been here?"

"Three weeks," said Mary. Not another word was said; but a certain constraint and embarrassment,—at least so she thought,—had come over him. When she lit her candle this time he made no attempt to detain her. She thought even that he gave a sigh of relief as he opened the door for her, and said good-night; and it was hard for Mary to think with any charity of the woman who had thus waylaid him,—waylaid his very imagination,—on the night even of his return. Possibly she was quite wrong in her estimate of Ben's feelings. When she was gone he threw himself heavily into a chair, and sat for an hour or more, doing nothing,—chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy. But no doubt he had enough to think about without that. It would have been strange had the coming home,—the approach of certainty after his long suspense,—the familiar life that seemed to have taken him up again after casting him out of its bosom,—produced no excitement in his mind. And then there was that curious sense of unreality which comes upon a man when, after an active life of his own, he returns to his father's house, and finds everything, down to the minutest particular, just as it used to be. Is not this life such stuff as dreams are made of? To Ben, who was not a man of thought, this sentiment was bewildering; and the quiet of the house weighed upon him with an irritating heaviness. Talk of noise! There is no such babel as that of silence when it surges round you, when no living thing stirs, and the mysterious air rustles its wings in your ears, and the earth vibrates under your feet. The flutter of moths and invisible insects attracted by the light, the rustle of the leaves outside, the curtains waving in the night air, the mysterious thrills which ran through the furniture, the wavering of the flame of the lamp,—all affected Ben when he was left alone. His life had been so busy and full of action,—and now he had left that existence which was his own, and come back into the midst of those shadows to await the last sentence of a dead man's voice, and have his whole destiny, perhaps, thrown once more into mistiness and darkness. Had there been any need for that boat softly rocking on the curve of the silvered water,—for that white solitary figure in the moonlight,—to complicate matters further? But whether that last incident did count for anything in the multiplicity of his thoughts, or whether it affected him as Mary supposed,—and as Millicent meant it to affect him,—who can tell? He sat a long time thinking, but he uttered none of his thoughts in the shape of soliloquy, which is unfortunate for this narrative; and I am obliged to wait, as most people are compelled to do, for the slow elucidation of events, to show the turn taken by Ben Renton's thoughts.

Mary's mind went more rapidly to a conclusion, as may be supposed. She could no more tell than I can what Ben was really

turning over in his thoughts ; but one thing was clear to her, that he had not heard of the neighbourhood of Millicent with indifference. It might be indignation, it might be disgust, it might be concealed and suppressed delight ; but, at all events, the information had moved him. And, at the same time, he had been very nice to herself,—very friendly, almost more than friendly,—affectionate ; not forgetting to help her even when she had just thrown that bombshell into his rest. To be sure, he had hurried her up the hill, unconscious of the rapidity of his pace ; but that was little in comparison with his kindness in remembering her at all when he had just heard such news. So Mary said to herself, thinking, like a romantic young woman, that Ben must have straightway forgot everything but Millicent. Well ! She was like a sister to him ; he was ready to trust her, ready to rely upon her, ready even to admire and praise her in that frank, affectionate way as a brother might. Why should there be any heaviness or sense of disappointment in her heart ? Mary said to herself that it was only because of its being Millicent, who was not worthy of him. If it had been almost anybody else,—if it had been half-a-dozen girls she could name to herself, who were good girls, and would have made him happy ! But Millicent was no mate for Ben ! That was the only reason of the blank sense of pain and vacancy in her heart. For herself, she was more than content.

And thus the old house closed its protecting doors upon the first instalment of the restored family ; and with that received agitation, disquiet, unrest, into the bosom of the stillness. Renton had been lying high and dry, like a stranded vessel, for all those years, and peace had dwelt in it ; but now that the tide was creeping up, and life stealing back, the natural accompaniment returned. Sighs of impatience, disappointment, pain,—eager desires for the future, which came so slowly, counting the minutes,—a sense, overmastering everything, of the hardness and strangeness of life. Nobody had thought of life as hard, as troublous, or full of fatal mistakes, during all those years when Mrs. Renton had driven about the lanes, and taken care of her health. The blessed bonds of routine had kept things going, and nobody was either glad or miserable. But as soon as the bigger life came back with chances of happiness in it, then the balancing chances of pain also returned. As soon as it becomes possible that you may be blessed, it also becomes possible that you may fall into the lowest depths of anguish. This was the strange paradox which Mary Westbury contemplated as she heard Ben Renton's unaccustomed step going to his room after midnight, through the profound stillness of the sleeping house.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE NEXT MORNING.

Rising full of anxious thoughts of the excitement which must have taken possession of Ben from the revelations of the night, Mary was much taken aback to meet her cousin, in, to all appearance, an extremely cheerful state of mind, next morning. He had been up early, and had taken a long walk, and renewed,—he told her,—his acquaintance with the country. "If one had it in one's own hands one could do a great deal more with it than has been done yet," he said, looking more like the portraits of the old Rentons than Mary liked to see.

"I am sure I hope nobody will ever try to improve it as long as I am here," she said, with a little heat,—for Renton as a parish, and Berks as a county, were to Mary the perfection of the earth.

"You don't like stagnant ponds, I hope," said Ben, laughing at her vehemence,—*"nor cottages falling to pieces,—nor fields that are flooded with every heavy rain."*

"But I like the broad turf on the roadsides, and the old hedges, and the old trees," said Mary, "and everything one has been used to all one's life. Ah, Ben, whatever you do, don't spoil Renton! I should break my heart."

"Probably I shall never have it in my power to spoil Renton," he said, with a short sigh of impatience. "I wish I had not come home until the very day fixed for this reading of the will. It is hard work hanging about here and kicking one's heels and waiting. My father was very hard upon us, Mary. It was too much to ask from any set of men."

"I don't think it has done you much harm," said Mary, whose natural impulse was to defend the ancient authorities, however much she might sympathise with the sufferers in her heart.

"Don't you?" said Ben, walking away from the breakfast-table to the window, where he stood drawing up and down the blind with preoccupied looks. After a few minutes she too moved and went up to him. Her mind was full of anxiety to say something,—to give him to understand that she could enter into his feelings; but it was so difficult to enter upon such a subject with a man, and especially with such a man as Ben.

"Ben, I think I know,—a little,—what you mean," she said, faltering; "and I can see how, in some things, it must have been very hard,—preventing you from,—often,—doing what you wished; but now that is over. You need not wait now."

He turned round and looked at her with some surprise in his eyes. "You don't know what you are saying, Mary," he said. "I am like most men, very glad now to have been prevented doing things which at one time I would fain have done. And you are right, too,—I am

my own master now,—not because the will is to be read this day week, but because I have found a trade and can work at it;—but that was not what I meant."

Mary sat down patiently and raised her eyes to him that he might tell her what he did mean. She was in the way of listening to a great many explanations, and thought them natural. Ben, for his part, stood and looked at her for a minute, and then turned away with a laugh. "Poor Mary!" he said. "What wearisome talk you must have listened to all these years,—going into everything! You must have a special faculty for that sort of thing, you women; how have you managed to live through it all and keep your youth and your bloom?"

"There has been nothing so dreadful to live through," said Mary; "but as for the youth, I don't pretend to that any longer. It is gone, like so many other pretty things; and I was not thinking of myself."

"Not now, nor ever," said her cousin; "but I don't feel disposed to give up the matter as you do. I don't feel very aged."

"But you are a man," said Mary, interrupting him, "which makes all the difference; and besides, this sort of talk is quite nonsense. I must go and read the paper to godmamma. Have you done with it?" And she took the "Times" from the table, and was about to leave the room.

"I have not done with it," said Ben. "I have not begun it even. I am going to read it to my mother, and you shall come and listen, if you like. You have done our duty long enough. It is but fair I should take my spell now."

Mary made a little protestation, but Ben was not disposed to give in. He was ennuyé for one thing, and did not want to be alone and give himself up to troublesome thoughts. There are times when it is better to do even the most humble of domestic duties than to be left to yourself. Mary thought, as she took her work and sat down near the window of her godmother's room, at some distance from the reader and listener, that affairs were wonderfully changed indeed, and that Ben's dutifulness was beyond all the traditions of good behaviour she had ever known. Mrs. Renton herself was a little overpowered by so sublime an act. Ben did not read steadily through as Mary did. He read not the bits of news which were her favourite study, but leading articles and speeches, which were not in her way. And then he would pause and talk in the middle of them, often turning his chair round towards Mary, and defrauding his mother both of the paper and his attention. It was pleasant, no doubt, to have a man in the house, and still more pleasant to have Ben at home; but the great and unexpected condescension of his morning visit to read the paper was not by any means so great a pleasure as it looked. But for the name of the thing she would really have preferred Davison; and Mary's reading was infinitely more satisfactory. When Ben wound

up by saying, as it is the proper formula to say, that there was nothing in it, Mrs. Renton could not but echo the words with a little querulousness in her tone. He threw the paper carelessly on to the bed, and the poor lady drew it towards her, and made a feeble search after her spectacles.

"Indeed there seems very little," she said, "much less than on most days; but it was very kind of you to think of coming and reading to me, Ben."

"I mean to come every morning, mother," he replied,—at which Mrs. Renton shivered,—“and relieve Mary a little. By-the-bye, I want to know whether you will mind if I have Hillyard here. I told him he was to come on Saturday, if he did not hear from me to the contrary. He is not quite in your way, but he is a very good fellow. I thought you would not mind if I had him here.”

"My dear boy, the house is yours,—or at least will soon be yours," said Mrs. Renton. "It is very nice of you to consult me, and you know I am not very able to receive strangers; but still Mary is there to do all that is necessary, and of course you must have your friends."

"Mother, I should like you to understand that it is not at all of course," said Ben. "The house is not mine,—I am not calculating that it will ever be mine. I want Hillyard, not so much because he is my friend, as because he is with me in business. He is my right-hand man——"

"It was Mr. Hillyard you went to America with at first?" said Mary, from her distant seat.

And Ben, relieved, walked across the room, finding she was easier to talk to than his mother. "Eh? Yes, it is the same Hillyard," he said, with a laugh which had some pleasure in it. "I was his right-hand man then, and now he is mine. That is all the difference; but we have always hung together all the same."

"Then you have done better than he has," said Mary, looking up at him with a smile.

And Ben came and stood by the side of the table she was working at, and looked down upon her as he spoke. "He's a very good fellow," he said, "but he does not stick to his work. There are some people who do best to be masters, and some who do best to be subordinates. And when he is not master, poor fellow, he is worth a dozen ordinary men."

"When some one else is master?" said Mary, with natural female gratification.

"No compliments," said Ben. "A man needs to be as hard as iron, and as bold as brass;—though why brass should be the emblem of unpleasant boldness, by the way, I don't know."

When there had been as much of it as this, Mrs. Renton began to stir uneasily. "I cannot hear what you two are saying," she

said. "You have light enough for your work generally at this window, Mary. Why should you go away so far to-day? And, Ben, I can see there are two or three things here you did not read to me. There is a dreadful burglary somewhere, in a country house like this. It is dreadful to think we might be killed in our beds any night,—and gives it such an interest;—and there is a great deal out of 'Galignani' in the French article. 'Galignani' is always amusing. But Mary will read it to me when you go out."

"I was not thinking of going out,—at present, mother. When is Laurie coming? He ought to be here," said Ben. "I don't understand how a man can choose to shut himself up in London at this time of the year."

"But he is working at something," said Mary.

"He is always working at something, and I don't know what it is ever to come to. Laurie ought to be the eldest son,—if there is to be an eldest son among us," said Ben. "I think that would be the best solution. He could muse about his fields, and paint the trees, and make a very good country gentleman,—don't you think so, Mary?—and marry and make everybody comfortable;—that is how it ought to be."

"Ben," said his mother, solemnly, "I hope you have not been led astray into radical principles since you have been away. How could Laurie be the eldest son? Your poor dear papa did everything for the best. He thought it was good for you to wait, and no doubt it must have been good for you. But to speak as if he did not care for your rights! Why you were called Benedict because you were the eldest son. I said to Mr. Renton, 'I hate the name,—it is the ugliest name I know.' But he always said, 'My dear, we can't help ourselves; the Rentons have been Laurence and Benedict for hundreds of years,—and Laurence and Benedict they must continue to be; but you can call him Ben, you know,—or Dick, for that matter.' " "I had a good cry over it," Mrs. Renton said, dropping back fatigued upon her pillows; "for, if there is anything I hate, it is those short names like Ben and Dick; but he had his way. And now to think you should talk as if it had been all in vain!"

"Miss Mary," said Davison with decision, "my missis has talked a deal more than she ought, and I don't hold with excitement. If you and Mr. Ben was to go out for a walk now,—or something as would take him off his poor dear mamma," said the careful nurse, lowering her voice. Ben was too much for his mother. After seven years of soft, feminine glidings about her room, softened voices, perpetual consideration of her ailments, this "man in the house," though pleasant at first, was too much for her powers. "And I don't know how we'll ever do when they're all here," the faithful Davison murmured to herself as she sprinkled eau-de-Cologne about the pillows, and mixed some port with the arrowroot. And Ben was banished

forthwith from the room. "He is very nice at dinner, my dear," Mrs. Renton herself said, "but men never understand. And they should always have something to do, Mary. They are never happy without something to do."

"Poor Ben, this is his first day at home!" said Mary, when she had read all about the burglary, and calmed the patient down.

"But, my dear, they are always wretched themselves," said Mrs. Renton, "when they are quite unoccupied. You must find him something to do."

Thus it will be seen that Mary's labours were not much lightened by the arrival of the eldest son. When she went down-stairs after her newspaper reading, she found him in the library, yawning somewhat over a book. "Come and talk," he said, setting a chair for her; and then laughed a little over his own unsuitableness in the hushed and soft-toned house.

"It is because you have been so long away," said Mary. "You have gone off on one current, and we on another. I suppose it is always so when people are long parted. Is it not sad?"

"I don't think that it ought to be so," said Ben.

"And Laurie has his current, too, quite different. I should like to find out about Laurie. It is he I know least about," said Mary with a little sigh.

And then Ben smiled. "I should like to hear," he said, "what you know about me?" What did she know about him? Nothing, —and yet everything, Mary thought.

"Sometimes one divines," she said.

"And sometimes one divines all wrong," said Ben.

Then there followed a pause. It was a very exciting game of fence so far as she was concerned. But she felt instinctively that it was not safe to keep it up.

"Godmamma will not come down to luncheon," she said, "but in the evening I hope she will be all right again. And when Alice is here and the children they will be a great help. Alice is not clever, you know, but she harmonises things somehow. I wonder if it is because she is musical."

"You harmonise things, too, and you are not particularly musical," said Ben.

"Oh, me!" Mary turned away, not caring to discuss that subject. He was always so nice to her,—so frank and affectionate. "If he were to marry Ruth Escott, now, or Helen Cookesley, how nice it would be to be a sister to her!" Mary thought; but Millicent! Could he be thinking of Millicent now? He had got up from his chair, and was looking out with a certain wistfulness,—or at least what would have been wistfulness in a woman, who has always to wait for any one she particularly wishes to see. A man can go forth and seek, and has no call to be wistful; but then it was only according

to feminine rules that Mary, so long unaccustomed to anything else, could form her thoughts.

"I have ordered up a boat from Cookesley;" he said, "and remember, I mean to row you to the Swan's-Nest this afternoon. It is clearing up——" for it had become cloudy, and rain had fallen during that period of newspaper reading in Mrs. Renton's room. And then Ben went out abruptly and left her. He stood upon no sort of ceremony, but went away without any explanation, treating her as he might have treated a sister. In going to the Swan's Nest it would be necessary to pass The Willows; and at this moment he was taking the path to the river. Could it be that on the very first morning he would lay himself again at the syren's feet? Could it be the mere pleasure of passing her house, being in the neighbourhood, that moved him? Mary, without pausing to think, flew up-stairs,—up beyond the servants' floor to a little turret-room which commanded a view of the river. And when she had waited long enough to recover her breath, there sure enough was a boat shooting out from the green bank at Renton, with one figure in it, which must be Ben. And the course he took was up the river. She covered her face for a moment when she saw it, and a hot sudden tear brimmed just over, wetting her eyelashes. No more. Was it her business that she should weep over Ben's folly? No man can redeem his brother, much less any woman,—alas! However dreadful it might be, the man must go his own way.

Mrs. Renton rallied sufficiently that afternoon to go for her drive, and Mary's services were wanted accordingly. But when she had got through that duty, there was still time for the Swan's Nest, to which she had been looking forward with an excitement which was almost feverish. Ben was waiting for them at the door. He took his mother up to her room, subduing his big pace as best he could to quietness, and put her into Davison's hands for her rest before dinner. It was an arrangement very grateful to all parties. While Mrs. Renton was taking her favourite refreshment and being comfortably tucked up on her sofa, the young people were making their way down to the bank, with something of the gaiety of former days. "I once beat you, Ben, running down," Mary said, for a moment forgetting The Willows and all that was involved in it. "I defy you to beat me now," her cousin said, and Mary's heart for one moment felt so light that she made a woman's wild dash down one wind of the path, and stopped short breathless, catching at the great beech to support her. But between the branches of the beech Mary saw a sight which quickly sobered her. Could it be by previous arrangement, or was it by chance? A boat lay at the little steps before The Willows, and some one,—there could be no difficulty in guessing who,—was getting into it. Mary's heart sank away down to the lowest depths,—

a sudden sickness of the light, and the brightness, and the river, and the day, came over her. She turned even from Ben, feeling sick of him too. A certain contempt of him rose up in her tender soul. Yes; there are many pangs in the sensation with which a woman recognises that another less worthy is preferred to herself; but not the least penetrating is that instinctive involuntary contempt. He had gone and arranged with Millicent no doubt, and then he thought to please all parties by taking her, Mary, to meet the woman he loved. Ben, for his part, with the stupidity of a male creature, saw that some shadow had come over her, and thought she had struck her foot in her rapid descent against the roots of the beech. "Ah, you should not have gone in for it," he said not in triumph, but sympathy;—"take my arm. I hope you have not twisted your foot." Twisted her foot!—when it was he who had wrung her heart! But to be sure, Mary did not wish him to divine what was her real ailment; and it was so like a man! But the laughter and the fun were over. The two descended soberly to the river-side and got into the boat. And Mary gathered the cords of the little rudder into her hands, and Ben took up the sculls. They were face to face, and it was difficult for one to hide from the other what emotions might rise or what change come over them. "I am afraid you have hurt your foot badly,—you look quite pale," Ben said, bending forward to her with absolute anxiety. "Oh, no, I am all right," Mary replied, saying in her heart what fools men are. How stupid they must be!—a threadbare sentiment which does not bear expression. And then she cried, "Remember, I am strong," with a certain gleam of wicked glee. She could run him into the weeds if he showed too much interest in that other boat. She could keep him out of speaking distance to baulk Millicent's wiles. Mary began to feel herself when she pulled that cord which put some power into her hands, and saw the little skiff turn and dart about at her will from one side to another. "Take care what you are doing," cried Ben in dismay, thinking his coxswain had lost her wits; but she was only getting possession of them, and beginning to remember that there was no need to be passive, and that she, too, had arms in her hands.

And for a little they shot silently, vigorously, attending to their work, up the shining river. Mary could not speak, and Ben did not, being moved by a thousand associations. The first break in the silence was made by voices not their own, coming from the boat which Mary kept her eye on with the fixedness of enmity. Distant sounds of conversation and laughter came first, at which Ben pricked up his ears. "Don't run into any one," he said. "I hear voices;—there is somebody coming, and I hope you are keeping a look-out ahead——"

"You need not fear for me,—I see them," said Mary with

emphasis, and he made no sign as if he knew what she meant, but kept on rowing so quietly that he either did not know who was coming, or was, she thought, a most accomplished hypocrite. On the contrary, he too began to talk softly like a man absorbed in thoughts and pre-occupations of his own.

"The last time you and I were here together was one of my last days in England," he said ;—"do you remember? I was full of my own affairs and indifferent to everything; and, good life, what a fool I was!" he added to himself,—and then paused and sighed. Mary, for her part, saw all, noted all, and in her rashness felt anxious to test his meaning.

"You made me very curious," she said; "I was so anxious to know what you meant——" And there was no telling how much further she might have gone had not the other boat suddenly glanced alongside, and some one called her by her name. Some one! Millicent, looking more lovely than she had ever seen her, she thought, with a scarlet cloak lightly thrown over her black dress, lying back upon the cushions, holding gingerly in her hands the steering cords.

"Mary," Millicent called, softly,—*"is it you? Oh, I am sure one of your cousins must have come home! Stop and tell me! What a happy thing for Mrs. Renton! And are not you all in the seventh heaven?"*

The picture was one which neither of the cousins ever forgot. She was in the full bloom of her beauty, increased rather than diminished, by the severity of her mourning dress. The river sparkled like a mirror all round the gay little painted boat in which she reclined. An unusual flush of colour was on her cheek, and the young Guardsman who was rowing her gazed with eyes of worship on the lovely creature. No doubt she was excited. It seemed to Mary that even the boy who was with her was part of a plan,—the mise en scène which she had perfected for Ben's sake; and that her cheek was flushed with the excitement of the meeting and with her unusual anxiety that success might follow. For the first time for seven years Ben and she looked each other in the face. The Guardsman had run the other boat so close that she was almost as near to him as Mary was, confronting him, in a position in which she could watch his face and all its changes. When he looked up her eye was upon him. It was a curious meeting for those two, who had parted so differently. Was it possible she had forgotten how they parted? She looked at him with an unabashed, smiling, gracious countenance, while Ben, with some agitation, took off his hat.

"Is it Mr. Ben Renton?" Millicent said, softly. And Mary, looking on, saw the colour flash all over Ben's face at the sound of her voice. Then, in her heart, his cousin acquitted him of having arranged this interruption. On the contrary, he was so moved by it that he did not seem capable of finding his voice.

"Mr. Renton, Mrs. Henry Rich," Mary said, mechanically, attempting an introduction, though she knew how unnecessary that was.

"Ah, we have met before!" said Millicent. "Did I not tell you, Mary? We used to know each other, though your cousin seems to have forgotten me;—but, to be sure, I had then a different name."

"No, I have not forgotten," said Ben; "that would be difficult under any name."

And then there was a dead pause. Millicent put her arm over the edge of the boat and dipped her pretty hand into the water. She had a certain air of embarrassment, either real or assumed; and Ben looked at her with a curious openness and fixedness of gaze. "You have just come?" she said at last, not raising her eyes.

"Just come," said Ben; "and only for a few days."

Then Millicent's eyes rose, and turned to him curiously; and Mary, too, bewildered, gave him a frightened, anxious look. There was a whole drama in their glances, and yet the words were very constrained and very few which passed between them. "So soon?" Millicent said, with a surprised, half-sorrowful tone.

"So soon!" he repeated, with a kind of decision, always looking at her, till Mary, hard-hearted as she thought herself, felt that he was uncivil, and was moved to interfere; but Millicent bore it bravely enough. Her colour grew higher, her composure was a little shaken, but yet she did not betray any symptoms of mortification or fear.

"My mother would be glad to see you before you go," she said, faltering slightly. "We cannot forget our obligations to you,—though perhaps you have forgotten;" and then she tried another half-supplicating, anxious look.

"I have forgotten nothing," said Ben. "We Rentons have extraordinary memories. I will call on Mrs. Tracy if I can before we go."

"Then I will not detain you longer," Millicent said, with a look of relief. "What a pleasure it must be to you, Mary, to have your cousin to row you about? I am quite grateful to Mr. Horsman, who is so good as to bring me out. How delicious the river is, to be sure! Mr. Renton, it was you who used to tell me of it—first."

"Then I am glad to have added something to your pleasures," said Ben. He had adjusted his sculls, and did not manifest the least inclination to stay longer. On the contrary, Mary felt that he was anxious to go on, to get clear of this interruption. And not less anxious was the young Guardsman,—almost a boy,—who had taken his hat off sulkily, and waited his orders with eagerness. Millicent was the only one of the four who had any desire to linger. She gave Ben another long, searching look, to which he made no response, being busy, or appearing to be busy, with his sculls; and then she gave a little nod to her waterman.

"I dare say we shall meet again," she said, gaily, "unless you are going a very long way ;—au revoir."

"Good-bye," said Mary. And in another moment, with one pull of the steerage and one sweep of the oars, the Renton boat had shot wide of the other, darting off to one side with a nervous motion, for which Mary alone was responsible. Ben made no remark, which was symptom enough of his own agitation. Had he been as calm as he affected to be Mary knew well that her illegitimate energy would not have passed without remark. And they went up the river for some time at a tremendous pace, devoting themselves to their work with the energy of professional people. Mary steered beautifully all the way to the Swan's Nest. She steered as if her life depended on it, keeping the due course in every turn, avoiding, as she ought, the side where the current was strongest, which a steerswoman seldom remembers to do, and in every way justifying the old training which had been disused so long. And scarcely a word was spoken between them until they reached the end of their expedition. It was a sheltered little elbow of the river, a very bed of water-lilies in the season. And the green leaves still spread all round like a thick carpet upon the water. Then Ben took breath for the first time. He lay upon his oars and wiped his forehead, and drew a long breath. "That was hard work," he said with a sigh. But which it was that was hard work,—whether the encounter with Millicent, or their long, breathless sweep against the current, Mary could not tell.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AUNT LYDIA.

"LET us run to the Cottage for five minutes, and see mamma," said Mary, as they made their way back. "Fancy, Ben, she does not know you have come home!"

"Shall we have time?" Ben asked, making for the bank as he spoke. The path that led to the cottage struck off from the river side above The Willows. And it would be gaining time to make this little diversion. He had been so silent, saying nothing,—and a sense of disappointment had crept over Mary after the intense sympathy with which she felt she had been entering into all his thoughts.

But when he thrust the boat into the flowering bank, and helped her to jump out, Ben replied to her, though she had said nothing. "You are quite right," he said. "It is best in every way not to meet them again."

"Ben! I did not say a word——"

"No," he answered, "you did not, and it was very, very kind of you, Mary. I am more obliged to you than I can say. There are

some things which it is impossible to talk about. I thank you with all my heart."

What did this mean? Mary was accustomed to a great deal of talk about everything,—more talk than meaning, indeed. And she was a little bewildered by this absence of all explanation. She would have been comforted had he opened up a little and told her how it all was. But she submitted, of course, concluding it was his mannish, unsatisfactory way. And as they went hurriedly up the lane, in the kindness of her heart she slid her hand through Ben's arm. It was the softest, kindly touch, such as his sister's hand might have given. Was not she his sister, nearer to him than any one else, and, little as she did understand, yet knowing more of what was in his heart,—she thought,—than any other creature in the world? And Ben was not indifferent to that mute token of sympathy. He drew the timid hand closely through his arm. "My good little Mary!" he said; but even then he said no more. No explanation came, whatever she might do or say, which was hard, but had to be borne.

And this is how it was that Mrs. Westbury, to her very great amazement, saw her daughter and Ben Renton approaching the Cottage arm-in-arm,—“like an engaged couple,” she said afterwards,—which gave her a curious thrill of admiration and satisfaction at the first glance. When her nephew came up to her, however, nature prevailed,—and the recollection of her own agency, which nobody but herself believed in, in sending all the boys away.

“Ben!” she cried, and then kissed him, and held both his hands, and shed some tears of surprise and joy, “I am so glad to see you! I cannot tell how glad I am to see you! Have you all come home?”

“Only I,” said Ben; “but the others are coming, and Mary and I have come to fetch you, Aunt Lydia, to dine with my mother. She does not understand my noise and uncouthness, after the long spell of quiet she has had. After dinner Mary and I will bring you back.”

“Mary and you seem to be,—full of business,” said Mrs. Westbury, more and more astonished. She had intended to end her sentence differently, but had met Mary's eye, and paused, not quite knowing what to make of it. But she went up-stairs for her best cap, calling her daughter with her. “What is the meaning of all this, Mary?” she said. “What does Ben mean by it? For my part, I cannot tell what to think.”

“About what, mamma?” said Mary; but there was a little flutter in her heart which belied her composure. “Ben has come home, as you see, and he came to see you, as he ought to do, and he wants you to go to dinner. I think it is all very visible what he means.”

"It does not seem to me at all plain," said Mrs. Westbury; but then she put her hand into her wardrobe to get out her cap, and decided that it was best not to spoil sport by any premature remarks. It was startling to see Mary leaning so confidentially on her cousin's arm. And Ben's talk of "Mary and I" was very peculiar; and if the will was all right, such an arrangement would be a most sensible, most admirable one. But if things were going on so well of their own accord, it might be best to let them alone, and suffer the affair to take its own course. When she found herself walking down to the river a quarter of an hour afterwards, with a maid behind carrying her cap, and Ben and Mary on each side of her, Mrs. Westbury freely expressed her surprise at the whole business. "I was just going to have tea," she said. "One can't dine late when one is alone, and Laurence has gone over to Cookesley to see some of his friends. I never thought of seeing any of you, nor of Ben at all, though I knew he was expected. And now to find myself on my way to Renton! Laurence will be struck dumb when he comes home."

"So Laurence is a parson now," said Ben. "How droll it will be to see him so! but pleasant for you. You can keep hold of a parson and keep him at home."

"Yes. I expect you to give him Renton, you know, Ben, when old Mr. Palliser dies."

"Well, I suppose one of us is sure to have Renton to give," said Ben; "so that Laurence will be safe anyhow. But I have no confidence that it will be me."

"It must be you," said Mrs. Westbury, indignantly. And then there came a pause, and she was helped into the boat. "Who are those new people at The Willows?" she said, as she settled herself. "That is their boat; they are always on the water. They say she is a young widow; but I don't think that is much like a widow. Somebody told me you knew them, Mary. Was it yourself?"

"She was at Thornyeroft at school for a little," said Mary, giving her mother a look. The look put a stop to the conversation; but it had to be explained afterwards, which was done somewhat at the expense of truth. The Willows' boat had been drawn close to the bank before they passed, and Mary was less particular in steering wide of it. Millicent stood on the lawn, having just landed, with her scarlet cloak dropping off her shoulders, and waved her hand to them. "Good-night! How pleasant it has been!" she cried, her voice falling softly through the summer air, still full of the slanting sunshine. "Good-night!" Mary cried across the water. Ben never said a word; he did not even pause in the slow, vigorous, regular stroke which made the boat fly down the shining current. They were yards below The Willows before Millicent had finished speaking her two or three words. Was he afraid, or was he indifferent? And while

Mary's mind was busy about this question, Aunt Lydia was forming her little theories of a very different kind. When a young man passes by a very pretty woman without so much as raising his head, it means,—what does it mean?—that some one else has secured his attention, and taken up all his thoughts. Mrs. Westbury felt as if Providence itself was heaping coals of fire on her head. She it was who had brought about the banishment of the boys, and yet no sooner had the first of them come home than he set about fulfilling her dearest wish. But no doubt it was for Mary's sake,—Mary, who had never harmed any one, who had helped and served everybody from her cradle! How bright she had become all at once!—how she had learned to chatter like the rest! It seemed curious to Mrs. Westbury that an important event should be coming about in her child's life in which she herself had not been the chief actor,—especially that Mary should have had the sense to acquire for herself an eligible lover without any assistance. Ben did not look very much like a lover it is true, but Aunt Lydia was aware that a man in such a position is not always possessed with an insane delight, but often has a great deal to think of. She, too, was silent with the stress of her own thoughts. It was Mary who entertained them,—talking as she had never been heard to talk before,—full of wild spirits and fun. Her mother, who knew nothing of the story, did not perceive that Mary's gaiety came on suddenly after they passed *The Willows*, nor that her eyes had the humid and dilated look which signifies emotion. One finds things out so much more readily when one has an inkling of the "*fin mot*" of the enigma. Mrs. Westbury did not even know there was an enigma to solve, and set down her daughter's high spirits to what seemed to her the most natural and the most likely cause.

"I congratulate you, my dear, upon having Ben back again," she said to Mrs. Renton as she kissed her. They were not very fond of each other, the two ladies; but yet, by dint of connection and contiguity, had come to a certain habit of mutual dependence, though the support was chiefly on one side.

"Yes," Mrs. Renton said, with an under-tone which was slightly querulous. "He is a very good boy; but a stranger in the house makes such a difference in one's life."

"You don't call Ben a stranger, poor fellow! And he is so nice. It is quite a pleasure to see him back," said Mrs. Westbury. "I thought you would have been out of your wits with joy."

"And so I am," said Ben's mother, with a little indignation; "but there is nobody that has any real consideration for my weakness except Mary. She knows just how much I am able to bear. I suppose it is difficult for people in health to realise how weak I am."

"Well, my dear, you know I always said that if you would but make an effort to exert yourself it would do you all the good in the

world," said Mrs. Westbury; and then she went up-stairs to put on her cap. "I have no patience with your aunt," she said to Mary,— "thinking of her own little bits of ailments, half of which are mere indulgence, when her poor boy has just come home."

"Poor godmamma! I don't think she can help it," said Mary.

"Nonsense, child! I have said to her from the first that she ought to make an effort. How do you think I should ever have managed had I given in? And now tell me, please, what you meant by looking at me so, twice over, when I was speaking to Ben."

"I did not want you to talk about Mrs. Rich," said Mary, turning away as the exigencies of her own toilette required. "He used to know her, and I was afraid you might say something——"

"You might have left that to my own discretion," said Mrs. Westbury, with some offence.

"But, dear mamma, how could your discretion serve when you did not know?" said Mary. "And, poor fellow! he is so,—so——"

"So very devoted to some else that he could not even take the trouble to look at Mrs. Rich,—such a pretty woman, too!" said Mrs. Westbury. "It seems to me, my dear, that you have made the very most of your time."

"Oh, mamma, how dreadful that you should say so!" cried Mary, turning round again with flaming, crimson cheeks. "Surely, surely you know me better! And Ben, poor fellow! has so much to think of. Nothing could be further from his mind. I have been their sister all their lives. It would be hard if I could not try to be a little comfort to him now."

"My dear, if he needs comfort, I am sure I have no objection," said Mrs. Westbury, with a smile; and just then Mary's maid came into the room, and the conversation came to an end. It was this dreadful practical turn, which was in the old Renton blood, which bewildered the less energetic members of the family. But it was wonderful to see how Ben and Aunt Lydia got on at dinner. He told her more about his work, and what he had been doing, in half-an-hour than the others had extracted from him in twenty-four. And the Renton spirit sparkled in Mrs. Westbury's eyes as she listened. "Even if you had not made a penny, Ben," she said, in her energetic way, "I should be so much more pleased that you had been making some use of your talents than just hanging on in the old way at home."

"But I have made a penny," Ben said, with a kindred glance;—he was pleased with the thought, which gave Mary a momentary disgust;—"though it has cost more than it is worth in the making," he added, in a lower tone. And then his cousin forgave him, and was sorry for poor Ben. It was dangerous work for Mary, especially as there was still the excitement of the return expedition across the river, to convey Mrs. Westbury home, to look forward to. But, fortunately,

there was no one visible about The Willows when that moment came. Nothing but serene moonlight, white and peaceable, unbroken by any shadow or voice but their own, was on the gleaming river. And the Rev. Laurence Westbury standing on the bank in his clerical coat,—who had been at school when Ben left Renton,—to take his mother home, and bid the new-comer welcome;—and then the silent progress back down the stream in the moonlight. It surprised Mary afterwards to think how little Ben and she had said to each other, and yet what perfectly good company he had been. And thus they went on, those curious, rapid days.

CHAPTER L.

ALL HOME.

LAURIE arrived on the Friday, coming in, in his usual unexpected way, through the window, when they were all in the drawing-room after dinner. The brothers had met in town, where Ben had paused for a day on his way to Renton, so that their greeting was not mingled with any of those remarks on changed appearance and unexpected signs of age which are general after a long absence. But when they stood thus together for the first time for seven years, the difference between old things and new became more perceptible to the bystanders. The surroundings were so completely the same as of old that any variation from the past became more clear to them. The same lamps, shaded for their mother's sake; the same brilliant spot of light upon the tea-table, where the china and silver glittered; Mrs. Renton lying on the same sofa, in the same attitude, covered with the same Indian shawl; the same soft odour of mignonette and heliotrope, and earth and dew, stealing in at the great open window;—even the same moths, or reproductions of the same, making wild circles about the lamp. "And Mary, I think, is the very same," Laurie said, looking at her with true brotherly kindness. But "the boys" were not the same. Of the two it was Laurie who looked the eldest. He was just thirty, but the hair was getting thin on the top of his head, and his face was more worn than it had any right to be. Ben had broadened, almost imperceptibly, but still enough to indicate to the bystander that the first slim outline of youth was over. But Laurie, though he had not expanded, had aged even in the lines of his face; and then he had grown a little careless, like the society into which he had cast himself. He was dusty with his walk, and his velvet morning-coat looked strange and wild beside Ben's correct evening costume. Lazy Laurence still; but with all the difference between sanguine youth and meditative manhood! Mary, however, was the only one of the party who was troubled by the mystery of Laurie's subdued tone. Mrs. Renton was not given to speculation,

and Ben was occupied by his own affairs to the exclusion of all inquiry into those of others. Both mother and brother took it for granted that Laurie was just as it was natural he should be. Only Mary,—sisterly, womanly, anxious always to know how it was,—watched him with a sympathetic eye.

"Well! here we are at home once more, old fellow," said Laurie, throwing himself into an easy chair near the window, when the mother had been safely conveyed up-stairs.

"Yes, a home that always looks the same," said Ben. "I am not so sure as I used to be of the good of that. It makes one feel doubly the change in one's self."

"These are his Yankee notions," said Laurie. "I suppose he has given up primogeniture, and Church and State, and everything. But Mary is an orthodox person who will set us all right."

"As if women might not think about primogeniture and all the rest as well as you others!" said Mary. "We are the only people who take any time to think nowadays. Ben has done nothing but make railways,—and money,—and he likes it;—he is a real Renton," she cried, pleased to let him know her mind on that subject.

"And very right, too," said Laurie. "If there were not Rentons to be had somewhere how would the world get on?"

"But I don't care for the world," said Mary; "and I would much rather you were not fond of money, like everybody else,—you boys."

"I am very fond of money, but I never can get any," said Laurie. "I say to myself, if I should happen to come into reputation next century, what a collection of Rentons there will be for somebody to make a fortune of,—Ben's heirs most probably; or that little Mary of Frank's, who is a darling. Now that I think of it, as she is a painter's descendant, it is she who shall be my heir."

"I think much the best thing would be for you to have Renton, Laurie, and heirs of your own."

"Thanks," said Laurie; "my brothers are very kind. Frank took the trouble to write me a long letter ever so many years ago, adjuring me by all I held dear to marry a certain Nelly Rich."

"It was very impertinent of him," cried Mary, "and very conceited. Nelly Rich would no more have looked at you——"

"Showed her sense," said Laurie, quietly. "I am only telling you what actions have been set on foot for my benefit. But I never saw Nelly Rich except once, so I am not conceited; and as for Renton, no such iniquity could ever be, as that it should go past you, Ben."

"You speak strongly," said the elder brother.

"That is one result of time, you know. One can see now, without irreverence, how wrong my poor father was. Of course we would have been wretches had we been capable of anything but obedience at the time," said Laurie; "but, looking back, one can see more

clearly. He was wrong. I don't bear him any malice, poor dear old father! but he did us as much harm almost as was possible. And if Renton is left out of the natural succession, I shall say it is iniquity, and oppose it with all my power."

"It would be iniquity," Ben said, gravely. And then there was a pause. The three sat, going back into their individual memories, unaware what devious paths the others were treading. But for that Laurie might never have fallen into the temptation which had stolen what energy he had out of him, and strengthened all his dreamy, unpractical ways. But for that Ben might have given the Renton force and strength of work to his country, and served her,—as is the citizen's first duty,—instead of making American railroads, which another man might have been found to do. As for Mary, the paths in which she went wandering were not her own. It did not occur to her to think of the seven years, which for her had been simple loss. Had she been living at home, no doubt, long before this she would have married some one, and been like Alice, the mother of children. But such were not Mary's reflections. She was thinking if this had not happened Ben would have married Millicent seven years ago, and that, on the whole, everything was for the best.

They had but one other day to themselves; but during that day the house felt, with a bewildered sense of confusion and uncertainty, that old times had come back. Mr. Ben and Mr. Laurie had gone back to their old rooms; and their steps and voices, the peremptory orders of the eldest, the "chaff" of Mr. Laurie, "who was a gentleman as you never could understand whether he was in earnest or in joke,"—turned the heads of the old servants. They, like their mistress, were upset by the new régime; the dulness of the house had been a trouble to them when her reign of utter seclusion commenced; but if it was dull, there was little to do, and the house had habituated itself to the monotonous round. And now they felt it a hardship when the noise and the work recommenced, and dinner ran the risk of having to wait ten minutes, and breakfast was on the table from half-past eight to half-past ten. "All along o' that lazy Laurie as they calls him, and a very good name, too," said the affronted cook. Mary had much ado to keep them in working order. "There may be further changes after a while," she said to the old butler, who had carried them all in his arms, and knew about everything, and who would as soon have cut his throat as leave Renton;—"you must have patience for a little, and see how things turn out." Thus it will be seen that if the return of her cousins brought any happiness to Mary it brought a great increase of anxiety as well. And there was always the sense of Millicent's vicinity to weigh upon her mind. She had been looking forward for years to the family reunion as the end of tribulation and beginning of a better life; but up to this time her anticipations had not been fulfilled. Anxieties

had increased upon her,—one growing out of another. Instead of comfort and certainty, and the support which she had always been taught to believe were involved in the possession of “men in the house,” Mary found that these tenants had rather an agitating than a calming effect upon herself and the community in general. That she should have trouble about the dinners was natural; but that even their mother should require to be let softly down into the enjoyment of their society, and that circumstances in general required double consideration on account of their presence, were new ideas to Mary. And then it turned out that Mrs. Renton had spoken very truly when she said a man must have something to do. Both the boys were in a state of restlessness and excitement, not disposed to settle to anything. There was capital shooting to be had, and the partridges were everything a sportsman could desire; but somehow even Ben felt that partridges were not congenial to the occasion. And as for Laurie, he was too indolent to make any such exertion. “Wait till Frank comes,” he said. “Frank has energy for two. If we were on a Scotch moor, indeed, where you want to move about to keep yourself warm—; but it’s too hot, my dear fellow, for stumping about through the stubble. I’ll take Mary out after a bit for a row.” And Ben’s activities, too, culminated in the same idea. Laurie lay in the bottom of the boat, sometimes puffing gently at his cigar, doing simply nothing, while Ben pulled against stream, and Mary steered him dexterously through the weeds; and then the three floated slowly down again, saying little to each other, lingering along the mid current with scarcely any movement of the languid oars. They were not very sociable in this strange amusement; but still its starts of momentary violent exercise, its dreamy charm of movement, the warm autumnal sun overhead, the delicious gliding water that gurgled on the sides of the boat, and all the familiarity and all the novelty of the scene, chimed in with their feelings. Ben was pondering the future, which was still so dark,—his unfinished work at the other end of the world,—what he would do with Renton if it came to him,—what he would do if it did not come to him,—all the range of possibilities which overhung his way as the trees overhung the river. Laurie, for his part, wandered in a field of much wider fancy, and did not take Renton at all into account, nor the chances which a few days might bring to him. What did it matter? he could live, and he had no more to think of,—no future which interested him particularly,—no hope that would be affected by the tenor of his father’s will. Sometimes his eye would be caught by a combination of foliage, or a sudden light on the water, or the turn of Mary’s arm as she plied her cords. “How did Mary keep her steering up while we were all away?” he would say between the puffs of his cigar, and made up his mind that she should sit to him next day in that particular pose. Mary, for her own part, during

these expeditions, was too much occupied in watching her cousins to have any thoughts of her own. What was Ben thinking of? Was his mind fixed on *The Willows* as he opened his full chest and sent the boat up against the stream with the force of an arrow out of a bow? Was it the image of *Millicent* that made his eyes glow as he folded his arms, and let the skiff idle on the current? And what were Laurie's thoughts occupied about as he lay, lazy, in the bottom? Mary gazed at them, and wondered, not knowing what to think, and said to herself how much more difficult it was now to prognosticate what would become of them than it would have been seven years ago, at their first entering upon life. And thus the long day glided to its end.

On the Saturday Frank and his belongings arrived, and all was altered. Frank, so far as personal appearance went, was the least changed of all. His moustache had grown from the silky shadow it used to have into a very decided martial ornament, and he was brown with the Indian sun. Laurie had the presumption to insinuate that he had grown, which touched the soldier to the quick; but though he was the father of a family, the seven years had affected him less than either of his brothers. To be sure, he was but seven-and-twenty, and had lived a comparatively happy life. But it must be allowed that the Sunday was hard to get through. The three brothers, who, to begin with, were all very different men, had each got into his groove, and each undervalued,—let us not say had a contempt for,—the occupation of the other. What with India, and what with youth, and what with the training of his profession, Frank had all the unreasoning conservatism which was natural to a well-born unintellectual soldier. And then he had a wife to back him, which strengthens a man's self-opinion. "Depend upon it," he would say, "these Radicals will land us all in perdition if they get their way." "Why should I depend upon it? when my own opinion goes directly contrary;" Ben, who had been in America, and all over the world, drawing in revolutionary ideas, would answer him. As for Laurie he would ask them both, "What does it matter? One man is as good as another,—if not better," and smile in his poco-curante way. The children were a godsend to them all, and so was Alice with her youthful wisdom. For Mary by this time, with three men to keep in order, as it were, and Mrs. Renton to hold safely in hand all the time, and all unsuitable visitors to keep at a distance, and the dinner to order, was about as much overwhelmed with cares, and as little capable of the graces of society, as a woman could be. She had to spend with her aunt the hour of that inevitable Sunday afternoon walk, and saw her flock pair off and disappear among the trees with the sensations of an anxious mother, who feels her nursery for the moment in comparative safety. Ben with Alice and little Mary went one way, and Laurie and Frank took another. When

she had seen them off Mary turned with a satisfied mind to read to her godmother the Sunday periodical which took the place of the newspaper on this day. It was very mild reading though it satisfied Mrs. Renton. It was her principle not to drive on Sunday, and the morning was occupied by the Morning Service, which Davison and she read together before she got up, and that duty being over the Sunday periodical came in naturally to take the place of the drive. It was very rarely that she felt able to go to church; and of all days this day, which followed so closely the arrival of her sons, was the one on which she could least be supposed capable of such an exertion. So Mary read a story, and a sermon, and a missionary narrative, and was very tired of it, while the slow afternoon lingered on and the others had their walk.

Ben and Alice, though they were in the position of brother and sister, and called each other by their Christian names, had met for the first time on the day before, and naturally were not very much acquainted with each other's way of thinking. The woods were their great subject of discourse. "Frank has talked of them wherever we were," said Alice. "I am so glad to bring the children here. If we should have to go India again it will be nice for them to remember. But I need not speak like that," she added, after a moment's pause, with a sudden rush of tears to her blue eyes; "for if we have to go to India we must leave Mary behind. She is too old to go back. And I suppose if I were prudent, baby too;—but I could not bear that."

"Why should you go back to India?"

"Ah, we must, unless there is some money coming to us," said Alice. "You know I had no fortune. I did not think that mattered then; but when one has children one learns. Do you think there will be some money for Frank in the will?"

"I am certain of it," said Ben.

"Enough to make us able to stay at home!" said Alice, clasping her hands. "It is not that I care for money,—nor Frank either."

"But it is quite natural you should care. And I promise you," said Ben, "if there is anything I can set right, that you shall not go back to India. Whichever of us is preferred, you may be sure of that. I can answer for Laurie as for myself."

"Oh, I know Laurie," cried Alice; "but I did not know you;—and then perhaps Frank would not be willing;—but anyhow, since you say you are sure, I will keep up my heart."

And in the meantime Frank and Laurie by the river-side were having their confidences too. "If it should come to me," Frank was saying, "I hope I shall do what is right by Ben in any case—but it will be a struggle for that little beggar's sake."

"I would let the little beggar take his chance," said Laurie;

"there is time enough. I don't think you need begin to consider him yet."

"I should do my duty, of course," said Frank, "by Ben, who has been badly used; but I don't deny it will cost me something, Laurie. A man does not get ties about him for nothing. If I had the chance of a home for Alice and the little ones,—even if it were not a home like this, by Jove! it would be an awful temptation,—a temptation one would scarcely know how to resist."

"Then it is to be hoped it will never come," said Laurie. "I don't see how we could stand in doubt for an instant. I don't speak of natural justice. But Ben was brought up to be the heir. There was never a doubt of his being the heir till my poor father's will had to be read. Therefore he must be the heir now. I don't care whether it falls to you or me. It's as clear as daylight, and I can't believe you would find the least difficulty in doing what was right."

"I should do it," said Frank, but he made no further protestation. In his heart he could not but say to himself that it was easy for Laurie, a man with nobody dependent on him, with no question before him such as that of returning or not returning to India, and with,—so far as any one knew,—no prospects of future happiness which depended on this decision. And Ben, too, was unmarried, and like to be unmarried. "Unless he marries Mary," Frank said to himself! Of course if Renton fell to him he would marry, and they had all pledged themselves that Renton must fall to him, and Ben accordingly would sit down in his father's seat, and bring in some stranger to rule over the place, and Alice and the children would have to go away. Back to India! If that were the only alternative Frank felt as if it would be impossible to do his duty by Ben. The excitement of the moment, and the fundamental simplicity of his mind, thus brought him to the strange notion that all secondary justice must have been set aside, and that it would be a question of everything or nothing to the victor. Thus the Rentons awaited, with thoughts often too deep for words, with a restrained excitement wonderful to behold, with hopes and sinkings of heart, the revelation of their father's will; and that was to take place next day.

THE COMMON SCHOOLS OF AMERICA.

A few years ago there was no taunt more frequently levelled at prominent radical politicians than that they were attempting to Americanise our institutions. There were many causes for the jealousy of Transatlantic habits and modes of thought which prompted this expression. English exclusiveness felt outraged at the growth in America of ideas utterly opposed to those distinctions of rank and class which form so prominent a feature of European society. English gentility could see nothing but vulgarity in social arrangements which did not exhibit the frigid decorum of insular conventionalism. English Conservatism viewed with alarm the marvellous prosperity which the United States had achieved under a constitution not sanctioned by home traditions. The jealousy thus engendered was embittered by the feeling, none the less admitted in secret because often openly denied, that whatever social or political changes might occur in this country were far more likely to be of a democratic and therefore American type than otherwise. As might have been anticipated, too, there was mingled with this distrust of the great republic a vast amount of ignorance of the true character and working of its institutions and laws.

The existence at the present time of an improved state of feeling towards America on the part of English observers generally may be easily accounted for. It would be absurd any longer to charge the liberal party with a desire to introduce into this country American ideas and democratic legislation, when the most radical of all the political changes which this century has witnessed was consummated by their avowed opponents; absurder still not to accept frankly all the consequences which household suffrage will inevitably produce. Far wiser is it to endeavour to ascertain in what mode problems, similar to those awaiting solution here, have been dealt with in a country where the relative evils and advantages of any legislation are sure to be openly and amply displayed. Such a problem is that of national education; and we propose, accordingly, to lay before our readers a brief sketch of the common school system of the United States, availing ourselves chiefly of the very admirable Report on this subject presented to the Schools Inquiry Commission by the Rev. Dr. Fraser, now Bishop of Manchester.

The germ of the common school system of America must be sought for in the early history of the colony of Massachusetts Bay. In 1642, twenty-two years after the Pilgrim Fathers had landed from the "Mayflower," the general court of the colony by public Act

enjoined upon the "select men,"—a body analogous to our municipal corporation,—of each township to see "that none of their brethren or neighbours shall suffer so much barbarism in any of their families as not to endeavour to teach, by themselves or others, their children and apprentices so much learning as may enable them perfectly to read the English tongue, and obtain a knowledge of the capital laws, upon penalty of twenty shillings for each neglect therein." By subsequent legislation all townships, of whatever size, were required to found and support schools in sufficient number for the elementary education of all the children resident therein; and each township containing more than one hundred families was, in addition, to provide a "grammar school," in which the ancient languages should be taught, and youth be fitted for the university. In process of time the scheme thus indicated was altered; and, according to present law, the educational system of Massachusetts involves a threefold instead of a twofold gradation of schools. The preparation for the university is now left to the "high" school, the support of which is incumbent only on townships possessing more than four thousand inhabitants, while the "grammar school" omits all instruction in the "dead" languages, and simply carries to a higher level the education imparted in the elementary school. It was, moreover, distinctly provided that no children should be excluded from any public school on account of differences of race, colour, or religion. The Massachusetts system was, in fact, based on the recognition of the fundamental principles of the American Constitution,—perfect social equality and absolute religious freedom.

Such, then, was the theory of the common school system of Massachusetts, which has been carried out with certain variations in the other States of the Great Republic. In the New England States generally, the township is the political unit, and on the township authorities, therefore, acting under the supervision of the State Board of Education, rests the responsibility of seeing that the means of education are brought within the reach of every American child. Accordingly, in each township the management of the schools is entrusted to a school committee, elected annually by ballot, upon whom devolves the selection of teachers, the visitation of the schools, and the choice of books, subject to the limitation that "no book calculated to favour the tenets of any particular sect of Christians shall be used." In the State of New York the organisation is somewhat different: the "township" is superseded by the "county," the "select men" of the former being represented by county boards acting under the State Superintendent. Each township, moreover, has the power of dividing itself for educational purposes into "districts," in each of which a "prudential committee" is appointed, whose functions are substantially similar to those of the township school committee, to which body they are subordinate. A

district in which proper school accommodation is not forthcoming is liable to a fine of two hundred dollars.

The sources whence the common schools derive their support are three in number: the gifts of the nation, the school funds of the individual States, and the sums raised by local taxation. A brief examination of these will not only serve to show the variety of the modes by which education has been fostered in America, but will also exhibit some curious points of contrast between the boundless resources of that country and the limited means of older nations. Of the three million and a quarter square miles of land which constitute the territory of the United States, upwards of two millions and a quarter have, at different times, passed under the control of the Central Government by treaty with the various States which originally formed the Union. This vast tract of land, out of which have already been formed the sixteen sovereignties of Ohio, Illinois, Alabama, California, &c., has all been treated on a uniform plan. After survey, it has been laid out into "townships," six miles square, each divided into thirty-six sections or square miles, one of which, the 16th section, is specially set apart for the support of schools, and is called the "School Section." The land thus marked off passes into the hands of the State within whose boundaries it lies, and the income arising from its management forms funds which are differently designated in different States, but which are applied solely to educational purposes. The "Township Fund" in Illinois, and the "Irreducible Fund" in Ohio, originated in this manner. These funds will obviously differ widely in amount. In one township the section may have been more fortunately situated than in another, or may have been more judiciously managed. In Chicago, for example, the school section fell almost in the centre of the city, and though leased at low rents, produced upwards of one-fourth of the entire cost of the schools. In Ohio, on the other hand, the average value of the section was less than four dollars per acre, while in Illinois it reached three times that sum. The school section, however, was not the only gift of the nation towards the instruction of the youth of the several States. America could boast not only of an almost unbounded territory, but, until lately, of an entire exemption from debt. By the year 1836 the surplus revenue had so increased as to have become almost embarrassing. The surplus was, therefore, apportioned pro rata among the States, it being stipulated that in the event of any national emergency, the amount so advanced might be recalled. But not even in the dire necessities of the late war was the loan reclaimed, nor is it anticipated that repayment will ever be demanded. The income arising from this source forms what is known as the United States Deposit Fund, and is in most of the States devoted to the schools. Further, in 1862, the Central Government agreed, by the Agricultural College Act, to grant to each State which might express its concurrence in the scheme, a specified quantity of land for the

purpose of endowing and maintaining at least one college in each State for instruction in such branches of learning as are related to the agricultural and mechanical arts. This proposal met with general acceptance, and nearly five millions of acres have been thus assigned.

Turning now from the benefactions of the nation to the resources of the State, we find that every State in which the common school system is in operation possesses a school fund, arising from sale of lands, taxation, and many other sources. This fund is vested either in a Board of Education, in the State Legislature, or in officers specially appointed for the purpose. A desire to make the fund as serviceable as possible has led to many variations in its administration in different States. In Massachusetts, where the simplest arrangements are adopted, one-half of the income of the fund is devoted to normal colleges and training schools, while the other moiety—amounting in 1864 to upwards of fifty-five thousand dollars, is divided amongst the townships in proportion to the number of children in each, on condition that the township has raised, by local taxation, not less than a dollar and a half for each person between the age of five and fifteen.

But notwithstanding the endowments of the nation and of the State, the common schools look for their support mainly to local taxation. In Massachusetts, indeed, the proceeds of the State fund do not amount to more than a quarter of a dollar for each child; while the sum raised by taxation reaches nearly six times that amount. In Connecticut the State fund is much larger; but even there local contributions form the mainstay of the school. The school rate is assessed and collected with the other township taxes, and any township neglecting to levy the requisite rate is liable to penalties. In Massachusetts the amount of the rate is determined by the ratepayers themselves, and will, therefore, depend on local notions of what constitutes an efficient school; but in other States,—as, for instance, New York,—the rate may not exceed a certain limit. Owing to the fact that in America taxes are levied on the capital value of property, and not, as with us, on the annual income derivable therefrom, it is a difficult matter to estimate the amount raised by taxation for educational purposes. An approximate calculation shows, however, that in New York City the school tax amounts to five and a half per cent. of the income of capital, the interest of the latter being reckoned at six per cent.; while at Boston and Massachusetts the rate is about one-half that at New York. That such burdens as these should be cheerfully borne, not merely by an interested class, but by the whole community, affords ample proof of the sincere belief which the Americans have in their educational scheme. The practice of charging school fees has not been adopted to any great extent; and even where they are levied, they are the subject of so much debate as clearly to demonstrate that the practice is rather an excrescence of the common school system than an attractive feature of it. Unaided

by fees, the school rate must necessarily be high; but if the amount of the tax is unexpectedly high to those unaccustomed to educational rates, the operation of the tax in relieving the pocket of the individual parent will be unexpected too. The education of a child in the common schools of all grades, in eleven of the principal cities of the Union, does not exceed fifty shillings a year; and in the high school the average cost for a boy is nine guineas, for a girl five pounds ten shillings, a year. "So that," says Dr. Fraser, "I believe it is nothing more than a sober conclusion that an American farmer frequently gets an education for his family at a cost to the community of not more than ten shillings a year per child,—one-third of the amount at which our own Committee of Council have been in the habit of rating the cost of the education of the children of an English labourer."

The same democratic instincts which prompted the Massachusetts colonists to base their school system upon the two great principles of social equality and religious liberty, suggested also another of the more prominent features of that system,—the complete control by each township of its own educational arrangements. The State Board of Education may counsel or admonish; but its intervention is of little avail, if not supported by the public opinion of the district or township; and where the township itself has been divided into districts, the "Prudential Committee" of the latter are often at variance with the Board of Education of the former. Nepotism in the selection of teachers, jobbery of a most unscrupulous kind in the purchase of school requisites, and a general waste of power, are the frequent concomitants of this imperium in imperio. In county districts, moreover, where the evils resulting from the absence of any well-defined and supreme authority are chiefly discernible, the inspection of the schools is lax and irregular. In New York, Boston, and other large cities, where a very elaborate organisation of superintendents and inspectors has been set afoot, the school visitation is far more effective, and is so sanctioned by public opinion, that it is by no means unusual to find men of business, merchants and lawyers, to whom time is money in a very real sense, devoting an hour or two a day to the gratuitous inspection of the schools. Yet even in the cities there is confessedly a want of some such supreme control as that furnished by a Minister of Education, able to collect information as to the state of the schools, by means of a body of inspectors independent of local influences and free from local prejudices, and to enforce obedience to all legal requirements. Throughout the American organisation there appears to be no want of energy and persistence, but a decided lack of discipline.

Passing from the general administration of the schools to the tutorial staff, we find an organisation at once vigorous and systematic. Each group of schools, and in some States each school, possesses a principal, who is responsible for the observance of the rules laid down by the Board of Education, and whose duties are rather those

connected with superintendence than with instruction. Under him the teachers are ranked in seven classes,—vice-principals, ushers, head assistants, assistants, primary school teachers, music teachers, and sewing teachers. The principal, vice-principal, and ushers are males; the others, as a rule, females. By far the greater proportion of American teachers are women, for whom as instructors there is a great preference on the score both of cheapness and efficiency. No young woman can become a teacher under the age of seventeen, or without a certificate of qualification from the School Commissioner. As a rule, the schools for the training of teachers are far behind the other educational arrangements of the country. True, in most of the States where the common school system is in operation, normal schools have been established, but the supply of properly-qualified instructors from them is by no means equal to the demand. In consequence, many of the teachers are inexperienced, and more or less unfitted by special training to undertake the education of the young. But, on the other hand, the deficiencies thus occasioned are to a great extent compensated for by natural gifts. The energy, acuteness, and versatility so characteristic of the American nation, prove admirable qualifications for the work of tuition. The great majority of female teachers display self-possession and ambition, and their teaching is marked by fertility of illustration and liveliness of manner. In the maintenance of discipline they are materially aided by the deference which is universally paid to women in the United States. In their work they spare neither themselves nor their pupils. Nowhere are the duties of a school carried out with more zest and earnestness than in many of these primary schools. The depressing dullness, the humdrum monotony of the English dame's school is unknown. Indeed, it would appear that the intensity of the strain to which both teachers and taught are subjected, oftentimes exercises a prejudicial influence on the health of both. The profession of the teacher, as might be expected, stands socially high in America. In the country districts the female teacher is "boarded round," as the phrase is, at the houses of the farmers. She is treated with consideration, and the best room and the best fare are provided for her; but, on the other hand, her actual money remuneration is lamentably small. In many cases the salaries of teachers in the country, board included, do not exceed two pounds ten shillings a month, and that not secured for a longer period than a term of three or four months. In cities the salaries are higher, and the employment more permanent, but the necessities of life are vastly dearer. In Philadelphia, the Report of the Educational Board states that upwards of a thousand teachers, "cultivated and intelligent ladies," receive less than the washerwoman, and a large number less than "the janitress who sweeps the school-room." The highest salary paid to any principal is that received by the master of the New York Free Academy, and that only amounts to 4,000 dollars, or, at the

present rate of exchange, to £650 a year. It is not surprising that teachers accustomed to such rates of remuneration should have heard of the annual stipend of the head master of Eton with unaffected incredulity. The insufficiency of the salaries leads to constant changes amongst the teachers, who naturally regard the interests of the school as of less importance than the improvement of their own position. Frequent changes in the tutorial staff are evidently one of the most serious drawbacks to the success of the educational system.

The common school system, as founded in Massachusetts, undoubtedly contemplated the education of every child, irrespective of differences of rank or means. The social disparities which form such impassable lines of demarcation in all old countries did not then exist. Social like geological strata are the offspring of antiquity and transition. And, in America, growth and change have been alike rapid and unexpected. Thus, as wealth and population increased, and the United States of to-day developed with unparalleled vigour out of the humble colony of Massachusetts, class feelings and prejudices arose, not altogether unlike those whose tyranny compelled the expatriation of the founders of that colony. To such feelings and prejudices the common school scheme was not altogether acceptable. At the present time the common schools are used almost exclusively by the lower and middle classes, the artisans, storekeepers, and farmers, while the education of the youth of the higher classes has passed into the hands of private schoolmasters, and of such institutions as Harvard and Yale Universities,—the Oxford and Cambridge of the United States. Even where the grammar and high schools are adopted by middle-class people it is usual to supplement the instruction therein afforded by a year's classical training at a private school. There is no competition between the national and the private schools, each having an ample field of support of its own. The complete course of instruction in the former is supposed to extend over thirteen years, from the age of five to eighteen. As a rule, pupils enter the infant school at five or six, the grammar school at eight or nine, the high school at twelve or thirteen. Promotion from one grade to another depends upon examination; those who fail after a certain number of trials being, in some States, transferred to an "intermediate" school, specially provided for dull or neglected children. As the numbers passing these examinations are regarded as affording a complete test of the efficiency of the teacher and the general merit of the schools, it will be at once seen that ample scope is given for competition between the various schools in a district,—a competition often more severe than healthful. To enter the grammar school a pupil must be able to read easy prose, to spell common words, and work simple problems in mental arithmetic. Promotion to the high school implies more advanced knowledge in the general branches of study, and an acquaintance with Latin grammar. The high school, according to the theory of the Massachusetts system, was to fit youth for the

university. At present, however, the original intention seems to be but little considered, the school being rather complete in itself than preparatory to a university curriculum. In some States a general course and a classical course are laid down, the parents of the pupils being at liberty to select which they prefer; in others, the high school is divided into two distinct schools, one for English, the other for classics; while some instances occur in which the classical course is compulsory. Speaking of the English high school at Boston, Dr. Fraser remarks that he would have liked, if possible, to have put it under a glass case and brought it to England as a type of a thoroughly useful middle-class school. In New York and Philadelphia the high school assumes a higher rank, and confers degrees in arts and sciences. Yet even in these schools classics are not satisfactorily taught. Dr. Fraser, indeed, observes, with a regret which one can thoroughly understand in a cultivated scholar, the general want of classical culture in the United States. American conversation and literature are tinged but slightly with classical ideas and allusions. The great authors of antiquity have not met with the congenial society in the New World which they have long enjoyed in the Old. Nor is the reason difficult to discover. The traditional allegiance which England pays to the mental sovereignty of Greece and Rome is the result of many subtle influences, which could find no room to operate in a nation whose independent existence has not yet extended over a century. In America the conditions of the national life have partaken far too much of the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire, for the still small voice of classical lore to be heard. The common school system tends rather to afford information than to train the faculties; to teach facts more than to develop character. To the restlessness of the American mind the acquisition of facts would obviously be more acceptable than those slow and laborious processes which classical studies demand, and which, when not carried to excess, are specially fitted to strengthen the mental powers, and to discipline the judgment. De Tocqueville has pointed out the peculiar advantages to a democratic community of an intimacy with the masterpieces of ancient literature, and the wisdom of his suggestions is admitted by all impartial observers of American society. Yet if, on the one hand, the United States are conspicuous rather for a general diffusion of intelligence than for erudition, on the other hand, there can be no doubt that the taste for reading is to be found much lower in the social scale than is the case, for instance, in this country. The following anecdote, Dr. Fraser asserts, is typical. A Harvard student, home for a few days' vacation, wished to finish the third volume of Motley's "*History of the Dutch Republic*." Going in search of it to the township library, he finds it in use; and, pursuing his inquiries further, discovers, from the register of the library, that it has been taken out by his mother's washerwoman. Arrived at the woman's house, he asks her is she "through" with the book, or, if not, can she spare it to him

for just two days? "Well," replies the woman, "I can't just do that, for I'm mightily taken with the book; but I tell you what I'll do: I'll just put off my ironing till to-morrow afternoon, finish the book in the morning, and then I'll send it to you." Throughout the schools, moreover, no effort is spared to make the instruction really effective. Such idleness on the part of the scholars as is permitted at Eton, and other English public schools, would not be tolerated at an American high school. Continued indolence is punished by expulsion.

The action of the high school is, as may be supposed, confined to comparatively few of the population. Of all the children nominally educated under the common school system, the vast majority go no further than the grammar school, while of the lower classes great numbers stop with the primary school. And this leads at once to the question, so important at this time, as to compulsory attendance. The law at this point is explicit enough. Each State has its "truant law" and "truant officers." In Massachusetts every parent abstaining from sending his children to school is to be fined not more than twenty dollars. Further, no children may be employed in any manufacturing establishment unless they attend school for eleven to eighteen weeks during each year of employment, and any violation of these rules subjects the employer to a fine of fifty dollars. Other States have similar laws, but notwithstanding legislation, absenteeism and irregular attendance are declared to be evils of gigantic dimensions. It is asserted that the percentage of absences is higher in the United States than in this country. The truth is that these stringent truant laws do not seem to be supported by the public opinion of the country. Their necessity may be demonstrated by the most cogent arguments, the increase of rowdiness and juvenile depravity, the especial danger of an uneducated lower class in a country where the Government is practically in the hands of the masses. These and similar reasons are reiterated by school inspectors and officials; but, meanwhile, public opinion is not convinced, and the bad attendance of the pupils continues to present a saddening spectacle to the philanthropist and the patriot.

Yet, notwithstanding these hindrances, and the many failures resulting therefrom, the common school system can still point triumphantly to its achievements. In the words of Dr. Fraser, it has made the Americans, "if not the most highly-educated, certainly the most generally-educated and intelligent people on the earth." It has enabled the United States to encounter difficulties of a character and of a magnitude unknown to other nations. American statesmen contemplate without alarm a tide of immigration sufficient in volume to dislocate the very foundations of society. Relying on the sure but silent influence of their schools, they are confident of their ability to develop good citizenship out of the most unpromising materials. The Irish peasant and the German artisan have found in America nourishment for the mind not less wholesome than that

which the boundless territory of a New World has provided for the body. The political consequences, moreover, of the common schools are significant. Wherever the schools were established, treason against the Government found no favour with the people. If there had been a free school system in the South there would have been no secession, no civil war. In one respect, indeed, the intensely national feeling which everywhere pervades the American schools is by no means agreeable to an Englishman. The text-books generally in use abound in allusions calculated to excite contempt for British institutions and character. Everything English is depicted in dismal tints, so as to throw into bold relief the roseate hues with which everything American is portrayed. The Chief Superintendent of Education in Canada, while explaining that American school-books are excluded from Canadian schools because of their anti-British tendency, does not hesitate to assert that in 1837 the insurrectionary spirit was most prevalent in precisely those parts of Upper Canada where United States books had been used most extensively. English politicians would probably not be far wrong in tracing to this source much of that fretful jealousy of this country which may have been intensified, but was certainly not originated, by the Alabama controversy.

Turning to the relation of the common schools to religion, we cannot fail to observe how widely different are the influences which have moulded the national life in America from those with which we are familiar. In England it is impossible to recall what has already been achieved in the way of national education, or to discuss what may yet be attempted, without encountering at once the religious difficulty; in America, on the other hand, no religious difficulty has, until very recently, been met with. In this country the odium theologicum, proverbially the most bitter of all animosities, has found an ample field of action, and toleration has grown by slow and almost imperceptible degrees. The liberty which any sect enjoys has probably been gained after years of agitation against traditional persecution and contempt; and the very rigour with which its adherents have been treated serves but to kindle in their minds a devotion for certain distinctive tenets which the latter are often not worthy of, and which they would not otherwise have excited. The man who is persecuted for his opinions, like the traveller in the fable, wraps the cloak of his convictions about him with an energy proportioned to the vigour with which they are attacked. Differences of religion are, moreover, mingled with social and intellectual disparities. Nonconformity is inseparably associated with social and intellectual inferiority in the minds of the average country squire and parson. The combination may, to some extent, be justified by facts, but even then it is ungenerous to forget that in this country the dominant Church possesses a monopoly of the machinery specially fitted to promote culture and erudition. With the older universities barred against

him, and with the weight and prestige of a State Church opposed to him, what wonder that the Dissenter should exhibit a profound dread of proselytism, and should cling tenaciously to his sectarian organisation? Hence the denominational system of education, with its dogmatic religious teaching, and its avowed preference for voluntary support over Government aid,—a system confessedly wasteful, and inadequate to grapple with the ignorance of an old and crowded state of society. Now that the nation has at length aroused itself, and has resolved to provide for the elementary instruction of all its members, it is satisfactory to notice how surely the denominational is superseded by a national and a broader system.

In America, however, the education question has been stripped of the many jealousies and disputes which have caused so much perplexity in this country. True, the founders of the colony of Massachusetts were not the men to initiate an educational system of a purely secular character. At the same time, their position as colonists forbade a sectarian system. In the formation of a colony, men naturally unite on equal terms in their daily encounter with hardships and trials, and out of this community in trial springs a respect for differences of creed and opinion impossible in a country where conventional usages abound. Accordingly, the Massachusetts law, while directing, as we have already mentioned, that "no book calculated to favour the tenets of any particular sect of Christians shall be used," also required "the daily reading of some portion of the Bible in the common English version." American schools, then, are unsectarian, but are not secular. The daily exercises of the school commence with the reading, by the teacher, without comment, of a certain portion of the Scriptures, followed by the Lord's Prayer, repeated by the teacher alone. This is the general practice; but variations are often introduced to suit the exigencies of particular localities or the whims of particular teachers. In Cincinnati the pupils read the Bible, each one using the version preferred by his parents; in Philadelphia the reading of the Scriptures is followed by the singing of a suitable hymn; in some parts of Pennsylvania the Apostles' creed is repeated by the scholars.

Now it will hardly surprise any one accustomed to the manifestations of strong religious feeling to find that the very colourlessness of the religious teaching is, in the estimation of many, its chief blemish. This disjointed and inconsecutive reading of the Bible, unaccompanied by anything in the shape of note, explanation, or comment, cannot, it is urged, be called systematic religious instruction. A large proportion of the American youth is alleged to be growing up without any methodical acquaintance with the Bible. The daily reading of the Bible, according to the present system, is declared to be the merest form. A hundred sons of wealthy Jews are found in one grammar school in New York, who do not object to the daily perusal of the New Testament; not that they feel any

interest in the book, but that the act of reading it is regarded as a harmless conventionalism. In short, the common schools eradicate sectarianism, but substitute indifferentism. And this indifferentism is observable in the family as well as in the school. Two or three faiths are often professed in one domestic circle, and, on the Sunday, husband, wife, and children worship with different congregations. Why such a state of things as this should be attributed to indifference, and not to a spirit of enlightened toleration, we confess we cannot see; nor why it should be assumed that religion is losing its ground because identity of religious feeling is but lightly regarded in American society. Such phenomena follow necessarily from the impulses of religious equality on which American society is based. *Cucullus non facit monachum*, and the fact that differences of creed, discipline, and observance exist even within the limits of the home by no means implies that the principles of action which underly those creeds are less effective or less cherished than formerly. Further, we are assured that, in consequence of the absence of any specific religious instruction, the clergy generally regard the schools with coolness or dislike. In some few districts, parochial schools,—in other words, schools connected with religious communities,—have been established. The Roman Catholics are of course foremost in the avowal of their preference for separate schools. Their dislike, indeed, to any religious teaching, unless permeated with their own distinctive tenets, has produced unexpected consequences. In some schools in New York under the influence of Roman Catholic trustees, there has been a complete exclusion of the Bible. From other quarters the cry is heard that juvenile crime is on the increase, that old restraints are being gradually weakened, that rationalism and infidelity abound, that dark and troublous days are in store for Christianity, and the common schools, which might be so potent an agent for good, are all but valueless as moral teachers, because they afford no distinctive religious instruction.

Thus, with one class of religionists pleading for more definite religious teaching, and another class striving to abolish what little is already given, it is clear that the religious difficulty exists even in America. The cloud is at present scarcely bigger than a man's hand, but shrewd observers prophesy that it is growing, and that it may, in course of time, darken the horizon which the common schools have illuminated. Yet it must be obvious that if religious teaching of such scant proportions gives offence to some, how much bitterer will be the animosity when the instruction afforded is expanded into creeds and formularies! But systematic religious instruction involves creeds and formularies,—for the teacher who can give the one without resorting to the other, without introducing the "I believe" in some shape or other, has not yet appeared on earth,—and these, in turn, imply conscience clauses and other expedients which the New World is hardly likely to accept when the Old World is rejecting

them. The history of religious liberty in Europe, if it teaches anything, teaches this,—that there are few arguments which require more careful scrutiny at the hands of statesmen than those which are advanced by men of strong religious convictions when they are startled by the “overflowings of ungodliness,” or by the tardy progress of the faith they cherish.

THE JACKDAW THAT TURNED OUT A SWAN.

WE spoke some months ago in the pages of this magazine of a class of writers who might be fancifully classed as Jackdaw Authors, by reason of their inveterate habit of picking up worthless odds and ends, and hoarding them. There have been a few, however, who might seem at first sight to belong to the tribe, but who cannot be so classed without great injustice ;—writers whose propensity to collect and hoard was so marked as to indicate their relationship to the family, but the value of whose hoardings is so great as fairly to take them out of the category of the Jackdaw Authors.

One of these few, and perhaps the most notable of the number, was Louis de Rouvray, Duc de St. Simon, of whom it will hardly be considered a work of supererogation to give the English reader some brief account. For he will assuredly not have read or even dipped into any work professing to treat of the last twenty years of the reign of Louis XIV., and the eight years of the regency which followed it, without meeting constant references to the *Mémoires* of St. Simon. In all the history of France there is no more important or interesting period than that comprised in those eight-and-twenty years. For it was during those years that the Revolution was prepared for and rendered inevitable. During those years the barque of the State was gliding down the current, ever approaching more and more rapidly the fated Niagara in front. During those years,—or, at all events, during the earlier portion of them,—it might have been yet possible for human wisdom and worth to have directed the onward course of French society to other issues. After the close of that period it was too late. The reign of Louis XV. was but a doomed rush onwards to the raging cataract. The fate of the old French society was sealed during the years to which the *Mémoires* of St. Simon belong. And it is not too much to say, as more than one French historian has said, that before the publication of these *Mémoires* that period of French history neither was nor could be known.

Louis de Rouvray, Duc de St. Simon, was born on the 16th of January, 1675, began to write his *Mémoires* in 1694, and continued to

do so till the close of 1723. The sudden though not unexpected death of the Regent Philip is recorded in the last,—the 611th!—chapter of them. It was the will of St. Simon that no part of his MS. should be published for forty years after his death. "A writer,—of *Mémoires*,"—he says, "must have lost his senses to let it be even suspected that he is so occupied. His work should ripen under the surest lock and key, and pass thus into the possession of his heirs, who will act wisely to let one or more generations pass, and only permit the work to appear when it can do so without awakening resentments." But his intentions in this respect were not quite accurately carried out. For, as his death took place in 1755, the manuscript he left ought not, in accordance with his directions, to have been touched till the year 1795. But three volumes of extracts from the eleven huge folio volumes of the Duke's MS.* were published in 1788. They were received with an avidity that caused the publication of four more volumes of extracts in the following year. Another selection of extracts and abridgments from the *Mémoires* was published at Strasburg, in thirteen volumes, in 1791. The first complete edition of the work, however, was not given to the world till 1829—31, during which years the Marquis de St. Simon gave for the first time an edition of the entire work in twenty-one volumes. But the best edition is that of Hachette, Paris, 1856—8, in twenty volumes octavo, edited by M. Cheruel, and preceded by a notice from the hand of M. de Sainte Beuve.

"People have taken it into their heads," says M. Henri Martin, the recent admirable historian of France, in taking leave of the period illustrated by this immense mass of writing, "to make a great man of St. Simon. He was far from being anything of the sort. He was neither a great politician, nor a profound thinker, nor a man of correct judgment, although his views are often just and very sagacious on particular points; but he is a great painter! Across the immense mass of important things cleverly and vividly described, of unimportant things of which he makes mountains, of grave and tedious puerilities, of truth as to facts,—at least, those facts which he has seen,—and of romance as to the causes of them,—across all this there incessantly sparkle rays of genius, but of genius of a special order. It is the genius which seizes physiognomies, gestures, the smallest movements of bodies and minds, portraits of individuals and pictures of scenes, and fixes them in limning which one never forgets. A marvellous observer of details, and of the forms of all things, the indefatigable spy of two generations,—the last of the seventeenth and the first of the eighteenth century,—this most insatiably curious of

* These eleven volumes of the Duke's autograph were preserved for a long time in the office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Paris. But during the ministry of M. de la Ferronnays they were given up by royal order to M. le Marquis de St. Simon.

observers has left a work unlike any other which had preceded or has followed it. Or rather, it is not to be called a literary work at all. It is his entire existence, and that of all his contemporaries, that he gives us!"

Certainly, to see in the Duc de St. Simon a great man, or even a great politician, would imply a very singular notion of human greatness. But St. Simon had some higher qualities than Frenchmen, especially modern Frenchmen, are willing to credit him with. There were points in his character which are specially antipathetic to the children of '89. He was "grand seigneur" before all else,—grand seigneur to the marrow of his bones. The worship of "his order" was with him a fanaticism that approached the bounds of mania. Marmontel said of him that "in all the nation he saw only the noblesse, in the noblesse only the body of peers, and among the peers only himself." Duclos, in the introduction to his own *Mémoires*, speaks of the "manie ducale" of St. Simon. And in another passage,—*Mémoires*, An. 1718,—he says that he was full of "un mépris maniaque pour la robe." "He speaks in his *Mémoires*," says the annotator of Duclos, "with an elevation and mysticism of the dignity attaching to a duke and peer of France in a tone more abstruse than a treatise on the attributes of the Creator!" Henri Martin says that he was possessed by a fixed idea of the political grandeur of the Ducs-pairs de France, which he pushed to absolute monomania.* Voltaire occupied almost his last hours, when he was eighty-four years of age, in preparing a reply to St. Simon's *Mémoires*. For Voltaire could not pardon the uncompromising *Mémoire* writer for letting in the light of day, in the unsparing manner he has done, on the "grand siècle,"—the "siècle de Louis XIV." Had it not been for the revelations of St. Simon, the world would have had to accept Voltaire's couleur de rose flattered portrait for a true representation. Those who have consulted the *Mémoire* writer's pages, or those of any of the historians who have written since the publication of them, know how far Voltaire's celebrated and eloquent work is from giving any really true and adequate picture of the court and court circle of the "Grand Monarque." But this is in many respects distasteful to Frenchmen, even to many of them who are most thoroughly imbued with the sentiments and opinions born of the Revolution. With a strange inconsistency they cling to the notion of the Louis XIV. period having been "le grand siècle,"—a period of glory and greatness of which France has to be proud. And while largely using the information supplied so abundantly by St. Simon for the appreciation of that period, and the men of it in their true colours, the very readers who have so used it have felt a certain degree of ill-will towards the haughty old aristocrat, whose truthfulness has allowed the world to perceive that the so much-

* "Histoire de France," vol. xvii. p. 141.

boasted "grand siècle" was, in fact, one of the poorest, vilest, and most fatal ages that the world has seen.

Voltaire, even had his life been prolonged from eighty-four to ninety-four, would have laboured to little purpose to "answer" St. Simon. To have shown, as might very possibly have been done, that he disliked this man or that among his contemporaries, and that he was apt to speak more unfavourably of those persons whom he disliked than of those who were his friends, would have availed little. No one of those most competent to judge,—no one either of his contemporaries, who knew him, or of subsequent students of history, who have subjected his assertions to cross-examination by the light of all the other testimony which has come down to us,—has ever accused St. Simon of untruthfulness as to facts which occurred within his own observation. And the vast majority of all the enormous number of facts which he has recorded was of this nature.

Then, strange as it must seem, there appears to be little reason to doubt that, living all his life in the very midst of the most corrupt society the world ever saw, he was an upright, honest, moral, and God-fearing man. Had there been a few more such as St. Simon, the French social barque might even then have been steered out of the fatal current, which was rushing on with ever-increasing force towards the Niagara ahead. Had there been haply but twenty such, God might have still saved the city. But he stood almost, if not quite, alone. And on those terms the city could not be saved.

Not that it is to be understood that St. Simon had any large views; that he was at all capable of comprehending what, and what sort of things, was needed for the redemption of France out of the horrible condition in which the nation then was;—that he had even any adequate conception of that condition. He was essentially a courtier, and nothing but a courtier. He passed his whole life in the very innermost circle of the Versailles court, and had no conception of human objects, hopes, aims, or ideas, other than those which animated the denizens of the court. A fish might form as sound and comprehensive a judgment of what was needed for the well-being and governance of a flock of sheep, as he of the manner in which mankind viewed matters and conducted their lives on the outside of the circle which bounded all his ideas and all his experiences! But he was an honest man! And that in the midst of the men and women among whom he lived was so immense a thing!

At the court of Louis XIV., and during the last twenty years of that monarch's life, St. Simon was merely a spectator. He was a spectator so placed as to see everything, more completely perhaps than if he had been an actor; but he exercised no influence on the conduct of affairs. But with the accession of the Regent to power in 1715, St. Simon became one of the most influential men in the court. And this, when we consider what all the world knows of

Philip of Orleans, the Regent, in connection with what has been said above of St. Simon, seems to us to be strange. The old king dies; a very much worse and more profligate man succeeds to power; and St. Simon, the honest man par excellence in that court, becomes one of the principal supporters and counsellors of that bad and profligate man. But, in the first place, it must be remembered that the regency of the Duke of Orleans was a pis aller for France; that, bad as it was, there was good reason to think that the only available alternative would have been worse. And, further, it is to be considered that, contemptible and profligate as he was, Philip, Duke of Orleans, was a very clever man; whereas Louis XIV., who was a model of virtue in comparison with him, was a very stupid one. St. Simon had begun his career at court when the latter was already old, when the men around him were old too, and there was little possibility that any prominent position should be found in the Versailles hierarchy for a young new comer. But the Regent had need of the best help he could get. And accordingly, as Henri Martin writes,* "Among the intimate counsellors of this prince,—the Regent,—there was one who was singularly contrasted with all the others,—with those accomplices of the Palais Royal suppers, whom Philip, the fanfaron of crime, honoured, after his fashion, by naming them his Roués, because, as he said, they deserved to be roués.† This friend, who was frequently to be seen with Philip in the morning, and never in the evening, was the rigid, caustic, and religious St. Simon."

In whatever way, however, St. Simon, by his counsels, may have operated for good with the Regent, or striven to do so, it was certainly not by any tendency to turn from despotic, and towards what may be called constitutional, as distinguished from despotic forms of government. For the noblesse de la robe, the Parliament, formed the only existing body in which any check on arbitrary power could be sought. And "if adoration for the dues-et-pairs was the first article of St. Simon's faith, the second was contempt for the Parliament and the gens de la robe."‡ His first counsel to the Regent accordingly was to assemble the dues-et-pairs, and obtain their adhesion to his assumption of the regency, in utter contempt of the legality which required him to have recourse to the Parliament.

But here is another instance of the manner in which his influence with Philip was used, which shows the old aristocrat in a more favourable light. It is related by Duclos in his "*Mémoires*."§ One Courson, the son of the Intendant,—or, as Duclos writes, of the despot,—of Languedoc, had been made Intendant of Rouen.

* "*Histoire de France*," vol. xvii. p. 141.

† Roué, i.e., broken on the wheel. The Regent was thus the first inventor of a phrase which has become common enough.

‡ Henri Martin, *ibid*.

§ Collection Petitot, second series, vol. lxxvi. p. 281.

There his tyranny and extortions, the "brigandage of his secretaries, and the arrogant protection he accorded to them," had nearly caused him to be stoned by the populace. He saved his life by flight. It was felt to be impossible to force him back again upon the Normans; but, by the credit of his father, he was made Intendant of Guienne. There he absolutely ran riot in despotism and tyranny to such a degree, that he imposed and collected taxes from the unhappy people subjected to his administration by his own private will and authority. The town of Périgueux remonstrated. The only reply they got was that the tyrant threw the sheriffs of the city into prison! The town sent deputies to the court to complain; and they besieged the cabinet of the Duc de Noailles, the Regent's minister, for two months, without ever being able to get beyond the antechamber. The minister was a friend of Courson; and knowing very well what the deputies from Périgueux were there for, endeavoured to get rid of the matter by tiring them out. But by good luck, the Comte de Toulouse, one of the natural sons of Louis XIV., whom Duclos calls "*parfaitement honnête homme*," happened to hear of the affair, and mentioned it to several of the Regent's Council, and especially to St. Simon, "who hated the Duc de Noailles, and who always put his whole heart into everything,"—*mettoit à tout la plus grande vivacité*. The first day, accordingly, on which the Council met after that, St. Simon asked the Duc de Noailles suddenly when he thought that he should be able to finish that Périgueux affair?—at the same time saying enough on the subject to show that he knew all about it. All the members of the Council turned their eyes on De Noailles, who stammered out that the affair was one which required much examination, and that other matters of more importance had hitherto prevented him from attending to it. St. Simon, backed by the Comte de Toulouse, said that nothing could be more important than to ascertain the truth or falsehood of accusations which had kept citizens three months in prison. Whereupon the Regent ordered De Noailles to report on the matter that day week. On the day named, the minister came to the council-room with a very full bag of papers; and St. Simon asked him whether the Périgueux affair was among them. De Noailles answered very sulkily that it was there, and would come in its turn. He then began by reading some other report, . . . and then another, . . . and so on. And at the end of each report St. Simon said, "Well! and what about the Périgueux affair?" It was an opera evening; and the Regent always went there on quitting the Council board; and De Noailles had flattered himself that he would be able to occupy the time, and get to the end of the sitting without bringing on the Périgueux business. At last, when the time for going to the opera came, the minister said that there remained only that affair, and that, as the report concerning it was very long, he would not deprive M. le Régent of his amusement. And with that he began

to put up his papers. But St. Simon stopped him by laying his hand on his arm, and turning to the Regent, asked him if he cared so very much about the opera as not to prefer to it the pleasure of doing justice to unfortunates who implored it from him.

The Regent sat down again and consented to hear the report. Noailles accordingly began to read in a perfect fury. But St. Simon, sitting beside him, kept his eye on the papers, read the important passages after the minister, and manifested a suspicion as to the fair reading of the report which was very offensive; but the case was so bad a one, that De Noailles was obliged himself to come to the conclusion that the prisoners ought to be released. But he excused Courson, and spoke largely of the services rendered by his father. St. Simon sharply interrupted him with the remark that there was no question about the services of the father, but about the iniquities of the son. And he said that in his opinion the prisoners ought to be recompensed at the expense of Courson, the latter turned out of his place, and that in so public a manner as should serve for an example to his fellows. The Regent concurred in St. Simon's opinion; who thereupon demanded that the decree to that effect should be drawn up and signed at once, remarking that he did not dare to trust to the memory of M. le Ministre;—and the Regent said he was ready to sign it. Noailles took up the pen, trembling with rage to such a degree that he could hardly hold it. When he came to the words which ousted Courson from his place he paused. "Well, write on!" said St. Simon, "that is the decree!" Noailles looked round at all the faces of those present to see whether he could see any hope of support in an attempt to modify the order. Thereupon St. Simon put the question aloud to each of them one by one, and there was unanimity in favour of the punishment awarded.

It is to be feared that few other equally pleasant glimpses of the interior doings of that Council of the Regency can be found. By what happened, indeed, on this occasion it is easy to infer how dissimilarly matters fell out in general. Duclos truly remarks, on finishing this little anecdote, that but for the purely fortuitous circumstance of the waiting of those poor deputies from far-off Périgueux in the antechamber of M. le Ministre coming to the ears of that "*parfaitement honnête homme*," le Comte de Toulouse, the monstrous and audacious tyranny and robbery of the scoundrel Courson would have remained not only unpunished, but unredressed. And one is left to imagine what was going on without hope of redress in all the other Intendancies of France. And so the Coursons and Co. went on, rowing hard stem on, towards the Niagara ahead.

In all the enormous mass of writing which St. Simon has left us there are perhaps no passages in which the excellences and defects of the writer can be studied to better effect than in what he has written of Fénélon, the celebrated Archbishop of Cambrai. He has

been accused by some of rancour and hostile feeling against Fénelon ; by others of excess in the eulogistic features of the portrait he has drawn of him. Unquestionably those who expect to find, and insist on seeing, in the celebrated archbishop a model of episcopal excellence, such as the latter half of the nineteenth century understands such a character, will not be contented with the picture of Fénelon which is found not only in the regularly-designed portrait of him which St. Simon gives on the occasion of speaking of his death, but in many scattered passages of the forty volumes. But, if we mistake not, the reader, who has read enough of St. Simon to know him well, and who comes to the reading of him with a tolerable knowledge of the times treated of, will find in all that he has written of Fénelon a very convincing proof of the truth of his statements, and the real candour of his judgments. In the supreme naïveté with which he attributes to the rising priest, especially at the beginning of his career, motives, schemes, and aims compatible only with the most mundane ambition and the most unscrupulous pursuit of the objects of that ambition, we see, on the one hand, the writer's own absolute incapacity for comprehending that human life ever was, or would be, or could be carried on in accordance with a very different standard of human conduct and principles ; and, on the other hand, a faithful portraiture of that state of things which alone could have rendered it possible for such thoughts, feelings, and motives as he attributes to the archbishop to be not incompatible with the virtues with which he also credits him.

We have ourselves no sort of doubt that the whole picture given of Fénelon in St. Simon's pages is as faithful and accurate as it is a very curious one. We cannot trace a sign of any word having been set down in malice, or, indeed, of any shadow of such feeling having existed in the writer's mind. As M. Michaud the younger well observes in his article on St. Simon,* had it not been for the unexpected death of the Dauphin, the son of Louis XIV., to whom Fénelon had been preceptor, St. Simon would doubtless have held a foremost place in the new court, and this by virtue of the influence of Fénelon. So that it is especially unreasonable and gratuitous to suppose him influenced by feelings of dislike to that prelate.

In all that St. Simon has left written of the famous archbishop, we may fairly assume that we have the utterances of one of the most truthful Frenchmen of that day speaking of one of the best of them ; and the picture of the society in which they both move, resulting therefrom, is singularly curious and interesting.

From the general portrait of the archbishop which St. Simon gives when speaking of his death, we shall endeavour to give in abridgment some passages, which will make the reader regret with us that the entirety is too long to be transferred to these pages. "It is certainly," says M. Michaud, "one of the truest and most finely-

* Biogr. Univ., art. St. Simon.

drawn portraits which exist. All that has been said of the author of 'Telemachus' in the amplifications of the innumerable academical panegyrics which have been written on the subject are not worth one of the delicate appreciations, and traits so vivid and so true, by which the courtier, who knew and comprehended him so well, has reproduced him before our eyes." The passage, moreover, is one which shows St. Simon at his best,—shows him for what he is really worth, and justifies our assertion that this one jackdaw at least has turned out a swan.

"The archbishop was a tall man, thin, well made, pale, with a large nose, and eyes from which intelligence and fire streamed in torrents. His physiognomy was unlike any that I ever saw, and which, once seen, could never be forgotten. It comprised everything, and contradictions did not jostle each other in it. There were seen in it gravity and gallantry, seriousness and gaiety. It partook of the character of the scholar, the bishop, and the grand seigneur. But the all-pervading character of it, as of all his person, was finesse, talent, grace, decorum, and especially dignity. It needed an effort to cease looking at him. His manners perfectly corresponded with the expression of his face, and had that ease which places others at their ease, and that air and perfect taste which are acquired only by frequenting the best society and the usage of the grand monde. With all that, he had a natural eloquence, pleasing and ornate; a politeness insinuating, and at the same time dignified and in due proportion to the occasion; a facile, clear, and agreeable manner of speaking; and a lucidity and neatness of expression, which rendered the most intricate and difficult matters easy to be understood. And with all that he was a man who would never appear cleverer than those with whom he was talking; who put himself on a level with everybody without allowing him to perceive that he was doing so; who placed people at their ease, and seemed to fascinate them in such sort that one found it difficult to quit him, or to resist him, or to abstain from seeking occasion to return to him. It was this talent, which is so rare, and which he possessed in the highest perfection, that kept all his friends so entirely attached to him during his whole life, notwithstanding his fall,* and that, when they were dispersed, made the speaking of him, regretting him, and longing for him, a point of union for them. It was this remarkable talent of attraction that made all of them hold to him more and more, as the Jews do to Jerusalem, and sigh for his return,† and never give up hoping for it, as that unhappy race still waits and sighs for the Messiah. It was also by means of this sort of prophet-like authority which he had acquired over his admirers that he had accustomed himself to a domination which, all gentle as

* i.e., his banishment from the court to his archbishopric, and the loss of M^{de}. de Maintenon's favour.

† From his exile at his archbishopric at Cambrai to the court.

it was, would not brook resistance. And by the same token, if he had returned to court and become a member of the Council,—which was always his great aim,—he would not long have tolerated any rival there; and, once well anchored there and having no longer need of others, it would have been very dangerous not only to resist him, but not to have been always on one's knees in admiration before him. When he had retired to his diocese, he lived there with the piety and diligence of a true pastor, and with the skill and magnificence of a man who has given up nothing, but whose schemes extend to all the world and comprise all things. Never was there a man who was dominated more than he by the desire of pleasing, and of pleasing the servant as much as the master. Never was there a man who carried this passion to a higher degree, or pursued that object with more unremitting, constant, and universal application; and never one who succeeded more completely in his object."

He goes on to describe how gradually he gathered a little court about him. Cambrai was on the high-road to the battle-fields in the Low Countries, on which the royal game of war was then chronically played; and all who passed that way visited the hospitable archbishop, and many made that their way for the sake of doing so.

"The number of people whom he had received on their passage through Cambrai, the care he had bestowed on the wounded who had on divers occasions been brought into the city, had won for him the hearts of the troops. He was assiduous in visiting the hospitals, and in attention to the smallest subalterns; hospitable to the chiefs, receiving many in his own house for many months at a time, till they were completely restored to health; watchful for the care of their souls like a true pastor; with that knowledge of the world which knew how to win their hearts and which induced many others to address themselves to him; never refusing to go to the poorest man in hospital, and caring for them as if he had nothing in the world else to do. He was not less active in providing for their bodily comforts. Nourishing soups and dishes, and often medicines, went out of his house in abundance. And, in the midst of so large a business, there was a detailed care that everything should be the best of its kind that is difficult to be conceived. It is hardly to be believed how, in consequence of all this, he became the idol of the army, and how his name was in everybody's mouth, even in the court itself."

Then, after speaking of his admirable administration of his diocese, he goes on;—"And with all this art and desire to please universally, there was nothing ever of meanness, of vulgarity, of affectation; nothing out of place, but everything duly adapted to the person in question. His morning hours were passed in the business of his diocese. Afterwards he received all who wished to see him. Then he went to say mass, and was quick about it. Returned from that, he dined with the company in his house, always numerous; eat little, and of light

things, but remained long at table for the sake of the others; and charmed them with the ease, the variety, and natural gaiety of his conversation, without ever descending to anything unworthy of a bishop and a grand seigneur. On rising from table, he remained but little with the company. He had accustomed them to live without ceremony, and he treated them with as little. Then he retired to his cabinet to work; then walked out of the town, of which he was very fond; at night supped with any officers who might be passing to or from the army, and was always in bed before midnight. Although his table was magnificent and *recherché*, and everything about him was conformable to the condition of a grand seigneur, yet there was nothing in his establishment that had not the flavour of episcopacy about it, and was not regulated in the most precise manner. He was himself an ever-present example to all around him, though one to which others could not attain; always a true prelate; always equally a grand seigneur; always, also, the author of '*Telemachus*.'

The writer goes on at length to point out that when he died, at the age of sixty-five, there was every reason to think that at the death of Louis XIV., which was evidently approaching, the way would have been open for him for that return to the court, to influence and to power, which had been the dream and the hope of his life. He moralises on the Tantalus-like fate which snatched this cup from his lips when nearest to them, and, remarking that it must have been hard so to die, says that it nevertheless did not seem so to the archbishop.

"Whether it were from care for his reputation, an object which was always all-powerful with him; or greatness of soul, which despised at last the objects it could not attain; or disgust at the world, which had so constantly disappointed him, and which he was now about to leave; or piety, excited by long practice of it,—he seemed insensible to all that he was quitting, and solely occupied with that to which he was going."

It is amusing to observe that the veteran courtier is unable to conceive the possibility that any one should despise the objects of court ambition, except when inspired by "greatness of soul" of the same quality that animated the fox who found the grapes unattainable. But it will surely not occur to any one who reads the above passages to imagine that the writer was animated by spiteful or ungenerous feelings towards the subject of his pen. It cannot be doubted, we think, that St. Simon has in this case, as in very many another, drawn not only a finished, but as truthful a portrait as he knew how to draw; and if, in doing so, he has painted himself also, not wholly in the colours which would best agree with nineteenth-century notions of a perfect character, the limning is only the more curious and the more valuable.

A GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

"Leisure is gone . . . fine old Leisure "

GEORGE ELIOT.

HE lived in "Farmer George's" day,
When men were less inclined to say
That "Time is Gold," and overlay
 With toil their pleasure ;
He held some land, and dwelt thereon,—
Where, I forget,—the house is gone ;
His Christian name, I think, was John,—
 His surname, Leisure.

Reynolds has painted him,—a face
Filled with a fine, old-fashioned grace,
Fresh-coloured, frank, without a trace
 Of care to shade it ;
The eyes are blue, the hair is drest
In plainest way,—one hand is prest
Deep in a flapped canary vest,
 With buds brocaded.

He wears a brown old Brunswick coat,
With silver buttons,—round his throat,
A soft cravat ;—in all you note
 A by-gone fashion,—
A strangeness, which, to us who shine
In shapely hats, whose coats combine
All harmonies of hue and line,
 Inspires compassion.

He lived so long ago, you see ;
Men were untravelled then, but we
Like Ariel, post by land and sea,
 With careless parting ;
He found it quite enough for him
To smoke his pipe in "gardens trim,"
And watch, about the fish-tank's brim,
 The swallows darting.

A Gentleman of the Old School.

He liked the well-wheel's creaking tongue,—
He liked the thrush that stopped and sung,—
He liked the drone of flies among
 His netted peaches ;
He liked to watch the sunlight fall
Athwart his ivied orchard wall,
Or pause to catch the cuckoo's call
 Beyond the beeches.

His were the times of paint and patch,
And yet no Ranelagh could match
The sober doves that round his thatch
 Spread tails and sidled ;
He liked their ruffling, puffed content,—
For him their drowsy wheelings meant
More than a Mall of Beaux that bent,
 Or Belles that bridled.

Not that, in truth, when life began
He shunned the flutter of the fan ;
He, too, had, maybe, "pinked his man"
 In beauty's quarrel ;
But now his " fervent youth " had flown
Where lost things go ; and he was grown
As staid and slow-paced as his own
 Old hunter, Sorrel.

Yet still he loved the chace, and held
That no composer's score excelled
The merry horn, when Sweetlip swelled
 The jovial riot ;
But most his measured words of praise
Caressed the angler's easy ways,—
His idly meditative days,—
 His rustic diet.

Not that his " meditating " rose
Beyond a sunny summer doze ;
He never troubled his repose
 With fruitless prying ;
But held, as law for high and low,
What God conceals no man can know,
And smiled away inquiry so,
 Without replying.

We read—alas, how much we read !—
The jumbled strifes of creed and creed,
With endless controversies feed

Our groaning tables :
His books—and they sufficed him—were
Cotton's " Montaigne," " The Grave " of Blair,
A " Walton "—much the worse for wear,
And " Æsop's Fables."

One more,—The Bible. Not that he
Had searched its page as deep as we ;
No sophistries could make him see
Its slender credit ;
It may be that he could not count
The race of Kings to Jesse's fount,—
He liked the " Sermon on the Mount,"—
And more, he read it.

Once he had loved, but failed to wed,
A red-cheeked lass who long was dead ;
His ways were far too slow, he said,
To quite forget her ;
And still when Time had turned him gray,
The earliest hawthorn buds in May
Would find his lingering feet astray,
Where first he met her.

" In Cælo Quies " heads the stone
On Leisure's grave,—now little known,
A tangle of wild rose has grown
So thick across it ;
The " Benefactions " still declare
He left the clerk an elbow chair,
And " 12 Pence yearly to prepare
A Christmas Posset."

Lie softly, Leisure ! Doubtless you,
With too serene a conscience drew
Your placid breath, and slumbered through
The gravest issue ;
But we, to whom our creed allows
Scarce space to wipe our weary brows,
Look down upon your narrow house,
Old friend, and miss you !

A.D.

CHARLES DICKENS.

It seems to have been but the other day that, sitting where I now sit, in the same chair, at the same table, with the same familiar things around me, I wrote for the "Cornhill Magazine" a few lines in remembrance of Thackeray, who had then been taken from us; and, when those lines appeared, they were preceded by others, very full of feeling, from his much older friend, Charles Dickens. Now I take up my pen again, because Charles Dickens has also gone, and because it is not fit that this publication should go forth without a word spoken to his honour.

It is singular that two men in age so nearly equal, in career so nearly allied, friends so old, and rivals so close, should each have left us so suddenly, without any of that notice, first doubting and then assured, which illness gives;—so that in the case of the one as of the other, the tidings of death's dealings have struck us a hard and startling blow, inflicting, not only sorrow, but for a while that positive, physical pain which comes from evil tidings which are totally unexpected. It was but a week or two since that I was discussing at the club that vexed question of American copyright with Mr. Dickens, and, while differing from him somewhat, was wondering at the youthful vitality of the man who seemed to have done his forty years of work without having a trace of it left upon him to lessen his energy, or rob his feelings of their freshness. It was but the other day that he spoke at the Academy dinner, and those who heard him then heard him at his best; and those who did not hear him, but only read his words, felt how fortunate it was that there should be such a man to speak for literature on such an occasion. When he took farewell of the public as a public reader, a few months since, the public wondered that a man in the very prime of his capacity should retire from such a career. But though there was to be an end of his readings, there was not, therefore, to be an end of his labours. He was to resume, and did resume, his old work, and when the first number of Edwin Drood's Mystery was bought up with unprecedented avidity by the lovers of Dickens's stories, it was feared, probably, by none but one that he might not live to finish his chronicle. He was a man, as we all thought, to live to be a hundred. He looked to be full of health, he walked vigorously, he stood, and spoke, and, above all, he laughed like a man in the full vigour of his life. He had never become impassive as men do who have grown old

beneath burdens too heavy for their shoulders. Whatever he did seemed to come from him easily, as though he delighted in the doing of it. To hear him speak was to long to be a speaker oneself; because the thing, when properly managed, could evidently be done so easily, so pleasantly, with such gratification not only to all hearers but to oneself! We were, indeed, told some time since that he was ill, and must seek rest for awhile; but any one may be ill for a period. What working man does not suffer occasionally? But he never looked ill when he was seen at his work. As I am now writing, it is just two years and two months since I entered the harbour of New York as he was leaving it, and I then called on him on board the "Russia." I found him with one of his feet bound up, and he told me, with that pleasant smile that was so common to him, that he had lectured himself off his legs; otherwise he was quite well. When I heard afterwards of his labours in the States, and of the condition in which those labours had been continued, it seemed to be marvellous that any constitution should have stood it. He himself knew, no doubt, where the shoe pinched him, where the burden was too heavy, where the strain told,—that strain, without which such work as his could not adequately be done; but there was a vitality in the man, and a certain manliness of demeanour, which made those who looked upon him believe that nothing that he had yet done had acted injuriously upon the machine of his body. But that it had so acted there can now be but little doubt. We have been told that he complained in his own home that his present work was burdensome to him, and that the task of composition was difficult. When making pecuniary arrangements for the publication of "Edwin Drood" he especially stipulated by deed that the publishers should be reimbursed for any possible loss that might accrue to them should he be prevented by death or sickness from completing his work,—a stipulation which can hardly have been necessary, but which, as it betrays his own nervousness, so also gives evidence of his high honour and thoughtful integrity.

The event, which he alone thought probable enough to require prevision, has taken place; and "Edwin Drood," like "Denis Duval," and "Wives and Daughters,"—the novel on which Mrs. Gaskell was engaged when she died,—will be left unfinished. To speak here of the circumstances of his life,—or of the manner of the sad catastrophe which has taken him from us,—would be unnecessary. The daily and weekly newspapers have already told the public all that can be told at once;—and that which will require later and careful telling, will we hope be told with care. Of the man's public work and public character it may perhaps not be amiss for one who remembers well the "Sketches by Boz" when they first came out, to say a few words. Of his novels, the first striking circumstance is their unprecedented popularity. This is not the time for exact criticism; but, even were

it so, no critic is justified in putting aside the consideration of that circumstance. When the masses of English readers, in all English-reading countries, have agreed to love the writings of any writer, their verdict will be stronger than that of any one judge, let that judge be ever so learned and ever so thoughtful. However the writer may have achieved his object, he has accomplished that which must be the desire of every author,—he has spoken to men and women who have opened their ears to his words, and have listened to them. He has reached the goal which all authors seek. In this respect Dickens was, probably, more fortunate during his own life than any writer that ever lived. The English-speaking public may be counted, perhaps, as a hundred millions, and wherever English is read these books are popular from the highest to the lowest,—among all classes that read. In England his novels are found in every house in which books are kept; but in America his circulation is much more extended than it is in England, because the houses in which books exist are much more numerous. I remember another novelist saying to me of Dickens,—my friend and his friend, Charles Lever,—that Dickens knew exactly how to tap the ever newly-growing mass of readers as it sprang up among the lower classes. He could measure the reading public,—probably taking his measure of it unconsciously,—and knew what the public wanted of him. Consequently the sale of his books has been hitherto so far from ephemeral,—their circulation has been so different from that which is expected for ordinary novels,—that it has resembled in its nature the sales of legs of mutton or of loaves of bread. The butcher or baker will know how many of this or of that article he will “do” in a summer or in a winter quarter, and so does the bookseller know how many “*Pickwicks*” and how many “*Nicklebys*” he will “do.” That there should be an average and continued demand for books as for other commodities, is not astonishing. That readers should require an increasing number of Shakespeares, or of Euclids, or of “*Robinson Crusoes*,” is not strange. But it is very strange that such a demand of an author’s works should have grown up during his own life, that the demand should be made in regard to novels, that it should have continued with unabated force,—and that it should exceed, as I believe it does exceed, the demand for the works of any other one writer in the language.

And no other writer of English language except Shakespeare has left so many types of character as Dickens has done,—characters which are known by their names familiarly as household words, and which bring to our minds vividly and at once, a certain well-understood set of ideas, habits, phrases, and costumes, making together a man, or woman, or child, whom we know at a glance and recognise at a sound,—as we do our own intimate friends. And it may be doubted whether even Shakespeare has done this for so wide a circle of acquaintances. To constant readers of Shakespeare, Iago and

Shylock, Rosalind and Juliet, Falstaff and Sir Toby, Lear and Lady Macbeth, have their characters so clearly discernible as to have become a part and parcel of their lives ;—but such readers are as yet comparatively few in numbers. And other great authors have achieved the same thing with, perhaps, one or two characters. Bobadil, Squire Western, the Vicar of Wakefield, and Colonel Newcomb, are among our very intimate friends, and have become types. With Scott's characters, glorious as they are, this is hardly the case. We know well the characters, as Scott has drawn them, of Ivanhoe, Meg Merrilies, Mr. Oldbuck, Balfour of Burley, and the Master of Ravenswood ;—but we know them as creations of Scott, and not as people in our own every-day world. We never meet with Meg Merrilies, or have any among our acquaintance whom we rank as being of the order of Ivanhoe. If we saw them in the flesh we should not recognise them at a glance. But Pickwick and Sam Weller, Mrs. Nickleby and Wackford Squeers, Fagin and Bill Sikes, Micawber, Mrs. Gamp, Pecksniff, and Bucket the Detective, are persons so well known to us that we think that they, who are in any way of the professions of these worthies, are untrue to themselves if they depart in aught from their recognised and understood portraits. Pickwick can never be repeated ;—*nulli similis aut secundus*, he is among our dearest and nearest, and we expect no one to be like him. But a "boots" at an hotel is more of a boots the closer he resembles Sam Weller. Many ladies talk like Mrs. Nickleby, and are perfect or imperfect in our estimation as they adhere or depart from their great prototype. With murderous Jews and their murdering agents we have probably but a distant acquaintance, but we fancy that they should be as are Fagin and Sikes. A schoolmaster who lives by starving his boys will certainly have but one eye, as was the case with Mr. Squeers. The man with whom something is ever about to turn up, is well-known to us, and is always considered by us to be going under an alias when he is not called Micawber. The lady who follows a certain profession that has ever been open to ladies is no longer called by the old name, but is Mrs. Gamp. Every hypocrite who knows his part, wears the Pecksniff shirt-collar. Every detective is to us a Bucket. And Dickens has given us conventional phrases of which everybody knows the meaning, though many are ignorant whence they come. To have "one's greens on one's mind" is as good English as "to be at sea" or "to be down in the mouth ;" but many who can do nothing while their greens are on their mind, who are always talking of their greens, forget that the phrase began with that old warrior Mrs. Bagnet.

Most of us have probably heard Dickens's works often criticised, want of art in the choice of words and want of nature in the creation of character, having been the faults most frequently attributed to him. But his words have been so potent, whether they may be right or

wrong according to any fixed rule, that they have justified themselves by making themselves into a language which is in itself popular; and his characters, if unnatural, have made a second nature by their own force. It is fatuous to condemn that as deficient in art which has been so full of art as to captivate all men. If the thing be done which was the aim of the artist,—fully done,—done beyond the power of other artists to accomplish,—the time for criticising the mode of doing it is gone by. Rules are needed in order that a certain effect may be obtained;—but if the effect has certainly been obtained, what need to seek whether or no the rule has been obeyed? The example, indeed, may be dangerous to others; as they have found who have imitated Dickens, and others will find who may imitate him in future.

It always seemed to me that no man ever devoted himself so entirely as Charles Dickens to things which he understood, and in which he could work with effect. Of other matters he seemed to have a disregard,—and for many things almost a contempt which was marvellous. To literature in all its branches his attachment was deep,—and his belief in it was a thorough conviction. He could speak about it as no other man spoke. He was always enthusiastic in its interests, ready to push on beginners, quick to encourage those who were winning their way to success, sympathetic with his contemporaries, and greatly generous to aid those who were failing. He thoroughly believed in literature; but in politics he seemed to have no belief at all. Men in so-called public life were to him, I will not say insincere men, but so placed as to be by their calling almost beyond the pale of sincerity. To his feeling, all departmental work was the bungled, muddled routine of a Circumlocution Office. Statecraft was odious to him; and though he would probably never have asserted that a country could be maintained without legislative or executive, he seemed to regard such devices as things so prone to evil, that the less of them the better it would be for the country,—and the farther a man kept himself from their immediate influence the better it would be for him. I never heard any man call Dickens a radical; but if any man ever was so, he was a radical at heart,—believing entirely in the people, writing for them, speaking for them, and always desirous to take their part as against some undescribed and indiscernible tyrant, who to his mind loomed large as an official rather than as an aristocratic despot. He hardly thought that our parliamentary rulers could be trusted to accomplish ought that was good for us. Good would come gradually,—but it would come by the strength of the people, and in opposition to the blundering of our rulers.

No man ever kept himself more aloof than Dickens from the ordinary honours of life. No titles were written after his name. He was not C.B., or D.C.L., or F.R.S.; nor did he ever attempt to

become M.P. What titles of honour may ever have been offered to him, I cannot say; but that titles were offered I do not doubt. Lord Russell, a year or two ago, proposed a measure by which, if carried, certain men of high character and great capacity would have been selected as peers for life; but Charles Dickens would never have been made a lord. He probably fully appreciated his own position; and had a noble confidence in himself, which made him feel that nothing Queen, Parliament, or Minister, could do for him would make him greater than he was. No title to his ear could have been higher than that name which he made familiar to the ears of all reading men and women.

He would attempt nothing,—show no interest in anything,—which he could not do, and which he did not understand. But he was not on that account forced to confine himself to literature. Every one knows how he read. Most readers of these lines, though they may never have seen him act,—as I never did,—still know that his acting was excellent. As an actor he would have been at the top of his profession. And he had another gift,—had it so wonderfully, that it may almost be said that he has left no equal behind him. He spoke so well, that a public dinner became a blessing instead of a curse, if he was in the chair,—had its compensating twenty minutes of pleasure, even if he were called upon to propose a toast, or to thank the company for drinking his health. For myself, I never could tell how far his speeches were ordinarily prepared;—but I can declare that I have heard him speak admirably when he has had to do so with no moment of preparation.

A great man has gone from us;—such a one that we may surely say of him that we shall not look upon his like again. As years roll on, we shall learn to appreciate his loss. He now rests in the spot consecrated to the memory of our greatest and noblest; and Englishmen would certainly not have been contented had he been laid elsewhere.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

ABOUT CHANOINESSES.

"Who is that young lady who wears an order on her bosom and a broad black and gold band across her body?" I once asked a Bohemian friend in the ball-room of the palace in Prague, the official residence of the Oberst burg-graf,—chief political personage of the kingdom of Bohemia. "She is a 'Stifts dame,'" he replied. "A what?" I exclaimed. "Perhaps you may have heard the term Chanoinesse?" he rejoined; "it is the French for Stifts dame, which is here used to designate a lady of noble birth who is a member of an historical institution called a 'Stift,' giving her the comforts of a home and a very advantageous social position. In fact, a Stifts dame can move about in society as if she were a married woman, and without the incumbrance of a, perhaps, tyrannical, jealous husband." "Capital!" I exclaimed; "what fun for her,"—for this conversation took place more than thirty years ago, and the word "jolly" was not then, as now, in vogue for every emphatic expression of admiration. "I am glad," I added, "that the first chanoinesse I behold, at least with consciousness, should be so favourable a specimen of the species; so young, pretty, and merry looking. It has puzzled me for some time to observe that she not only moves about herself without a chaperone, but that other young ladies, when not dancing, come to her as if she were acting the part of mamma to them." "And so it is," my friend further explained; "in virtue of her rank of 'Stifts dame,' she not only has, as I have said, the position of a married woman, and is addressed as Frau instead of Fräulein, but she has, moreover, the specific rank of the wife of an imperial chamberlain, or of a colonel in the army. And on great occasions, such, for instance, as the coronation of our kings, the ladies of both the institutions in our ancient city—for there are two—have particular places and functions assigned them."

My interest in "Stifts damen" being thus awakened, I determined to obtain further knowledge of the institutions in Prague, the pith of which I now communicate to my readers.

The older of the two institutions is in the so-called new town of Prague, and is designated "Die Frei-welt-adelige-Damen-stift zu den heiligen Engeln." The English of which is, "The free-noble-institute of Lay Canonesses to the Holy Angels." It owes its birth to a certain Countess von Bedarides, born von Gölitz, who, in the year 1701. by a donation of fifty thousand florins, and the promise

of a like sum on the death of herself and husband, obtained the sanction of the Emperor Leopold to found an institution for poor young ladies of noble birth. The document containing the "consens" of the emperor bears date 1st September, 1701. In another and much longer document, dated 8th November, 1703, the "consens" is confirmed, and all the rules and regulations of the institution are carefully drawn up. Some of these are of a quaint and very pedantic character, and if they ever were strictly carried out, the lives of the young ladies who were to benefit by the charity must have been far removed from that state of serene joyousness which, as we are taught, is the lot of the holy angels in heaven, in honour of whom the "Stift" was named.

In these fast times of ours, when thousands of questions, scientific and social, and many others connected with the present, demand the attention of aspiring and thoughtful ladies, it will not do to bore them with many details about the past; but a short account of the conditions of admission into a "Stift," and of the duties and privileges of the "Stifts damen," may not be devoid of interest.

Concerning the conditions of election of canonesses to this institution dedicated to the Holy Angels: It was ordained, firstly, that ladies, to be eligible, must be of founders' kin, or—failing a sufficiency of these—of "good Bohemian nobility" (at first four knightly ancestors on both sides were sufficient, but now the sixteen quarterings of pure nobility are demanded); secondly, that they must be unmarried and free from any engagement to marry; thirdly, "good Catholics;" fourthly, free from all personal deformities, neither one-eyed, lame, nor epileptic, and that they must be "inwardly of good complexion;" fifthly, of good character, gentle, obedient, peace-loving; sixthly, of good understanding (if found to be silly,—*einfaltig*,—during the year of "probation," they were to be dismissed); seventhly, that no lady should be admitted on trial under fifteen years of age nor over thirty, and no one to become a canoness and permitted to wear the insignia of the institution before the attainment of the sixteenth year. During the year of probation candidates were never to go outside the walls except with the express permission of the lady superior, and then only for the purpose of visiting parents, should they reside in the town. On no account was a single night to be passed out of the establishment. Religious instruction and exercises, under the supervision and control of a "Stifts-confessor"—who in the first instance, it was ordained by the emperor, must belong to the Society of Jesus—were to fill up much of the time of the canonesses, as well as of the aspirants; and there are many rules and directions respecting the cultivation of their minds which sound curious to our ears, and more suited to cramp than to expand the understanding. Devotion to the ruling House of Austria was likewise to be strictly inculcated. This may have been sound policy considering that some

of the "Stifts damen" might have inherited the patriotic feelings along with the blood of ancestors who certainly had no cause to bless the House of Hapsburg. Only the Pragmatic Sanction, accepted 1720 by the Bohemian Diet, secures to that House the Bohemian Crown, and, should it become extinct, it still belongs to the historical rights of that people to elect their own kings.

I do not know whether all the irksome rules for the education and conduct of the Stifts damen, both before and after appointment, were ever rigidly carried out. If they were, the adjectives, "free" and "lay," prefixed to their title of canonessees, could not have had much meaning. Not only were the doings of the ladies within the walls to depend greatly on the supervision and will of the "Oberinn," but they could never go abroad without her permission. Visits from gentlemen, even if near relatives, were prohibited unless in the presence of the chieftess, or an elder canoness deputed in her place. The possibility of "Galanterien" was carefully avoided.

At the time when I became acquainted with ladies of this "Stift," I may say "on avait changé tout cela," the young canonessees appeared to have plenty of liberty, to go freely into society, and to receive any visitors they liked. They gave, too, evening parties in their private apartments, at which officers and civilians, young as well as old, were present. But, of course, I must add, if in any case the bounds of propriety had been overstepped, the Oberinn would soon have come forward with the letter of her rules and regulations. Indeed, with the exception of the Hungarian baroness, who not long ago shocked the world with her wickedness, and who was merely an honorary chanoinesse of an Austrian Stift, without the right of residence, I have never heard of any "Stifts dame" who had given cause for scandal.

Some of the original rules of the older "Stift" in Prague, as laid down by the Emperor Leopold, are still in force. For instance, continuous residence in the institution during the year of probation is necessary. The dress, too,—viz., a black silk gown and the ribbon and insignia of the Stift, must be worn whenever the canonessees take part in any official or church ceremony, or grand festivity. When dressed, however, according to rule, it is not considered proper for canonessees to dance. The dance-loving young ladies, therefore, seldom go to balls wearing their insignia; and to judge from the remarkable vivacity which I have seen many of them display in flying round the large saloons of Prague and Vienna, I must infer that the conditions of not being lame, and of being "inwardly of good complexion," are strictly carried out.

The chanoinesses of the older establishment in Prague dwell in a large and tolerably ancient building, which once was a monastery. It was given them by the Empress Maria Theresia, to whom, likewise, they owe their rank in society. Large doors, or rather gates, admit

carriages over a wood pavement, to set down under cover. There are only apartments and offices for the porter and other male domestics on the ground-floor. At the back of the building are a court-yard, stables, coach-houses, &c.; and beyond is a tolerably sized garden, for the recreation of the ladies, in which are flower-beds and shrubs. There are separate sets of apartments, all on the first and second floors, for the seventeen canonesses belonging to this Stift. Each set of apartments, furnished by the ladies themselves, consists of at least three,—mostly large, and all lofty,—rooms, and in the broad passages, extending along the central parts of both floors, are arrangements for separate cooking. There is now no common table nor public commissariat, and every lady has her own female attendants. A regular physician is appointed to the Stift for the cure of the ladies' bodies; whilst the care of their souls is no longer in the hands of a Jesuit, for they are at liberty to have any confessor they choose.

The general establishment consists of a house-steward, a house-porter, four footmen in livery, two under-footmen for rough work,—called Haus-knechte,—a gardener, and two or three coachmen. The ladies have their own equipages, and a large subscription-box at the theatre. Respecting their visit to the latter, as well as the use of their carriages, they arrange daily amongst themselves. All outlays on the building, and for the general establishment, are paid from revenues derived from a large landed estate and other properties; and from these sources each canoness receives a stipend of about eight hundred florins per annum, the superioress and her assistants having more. Regular officials,—Beamte,—are appointed for the management of the Stift's property. The canonesses have likewise their legal adviser; and the whole of their business, or economical concerns, are under the gratuitous supervision of a Bohemian nobleman of high standing and official position.

Subsequent to the foundation of this Stift by Countess Bedarides, the heads of other ancient Bohemian families—as those of Waldstein, Kinsky, Lazansky, &c.—obtained imperial sanction to participate in it, on giving lands or other property towards the general estate. They thus gained one, two, or more places respectively for their female descendants and kin, according to the amount of their donations. To the present day this “Stift” has continued to bear the character of a families' endowment. There are no ladies in it not of founders' kin. The original stipulation that the canonesses should be poor as well as of pure nobility appears no longer to be carried out to the letter, though whenever there are several candidates for a vacant place the needs of the aspirants are taken into account. At the elections of new members generally all canonesses vote, the successful candidate being the one who has the majority of voices. But in respect to a few of the appointments, the heads of great families alone decide.

The "Oberinn" and the assistant-canonesses, however, are elected by general suffrage. All elections have to be confirmed by the Emperor of Austria (as King of Bohemia) for the time being.

The second institution of canonesses in Prague resembles in several essential respects the one just described. But though its origin is more recent, its members take precedence of the other canonesses, for it was founded solely by the Empress Maria Theresia, and bears the grand title of the "Imperial Royal Theresian Stift for Noble Ladies in the Castle of Prague." It dates from the year 1755, and a wing of the ancient palace,—the Schloss,—on the Hradschin, the highest part of the city, on the left bank of the Moldau,—was given by the empress for the ladies to reside in. Single ladies of Austrian as well as of pure Bohemian nobility are eligible. There is nothing of the republican character about this institution, which in some respects belongs to the other, for the emperors of Austria alone appoint the canonesses and elect the superiors. There are thirty canonesses in this Stift, all of whom have splendid apartments. The chief lady, who has the title of Abbess, but does not reside in the Stift, has hitherto always been an unmarried member of the imperial house. The first in rank belonging to the thirty ladies who have apartments is styled Deaconess, and there are likewise a sub-deaconess and two "canonesses-assistants" for the management of the institution. The Theresian Stift is richer than the other, and the ladies enjoy better stipends. As regards the general establishment,—stewards, servants, equipages, box at the theatre, physician, &c.,—things are much the same as in the older Stift.

As canonesses are not bound to celibacy, the young and pretty rarely long continue to enjoy their exceptional rank, their independence, and state of "single blessedness." Moving freely in society, they are as much, or more, exposed to the random shafts of the little god as any less favoured dames.* I have been present at the wedding of a Theresian chanoinesse, when she gave her hand, and gave up her comfortable position, for the sake of a gallant major of Lancers. The marriage took place in the chapel of the "Stift," and the breakfast in the apartments the bride was about to quit for ever. As all the canonesses then in the establishment took part in the ceremony, wearing their prescribed dresses, the little chapel had a very picturesque appearance. The Theresian canonesses wear black cloaks richly trimmed with ermine, and caps à la Marie Stuart,

* On the centenary anniversary (1855) of the founding of the Theresian Damenstift, a volume containing full particulars of its history was published at Prague. I gather from it that in the hundred years one hundred and fifty-two noble ladies (including the then canonesses) had benefited by the institution. Of these, two out of every seven had married; sixteen had lived to be over sixty years of age; fourteen over seventy; and seven over eighty. Three had taken the veil, or gone to other similar institutions, and some had resigned on becoming otherwise well provided for.

together with a broad white and gold band across the body, and an order on the bosom, as all canonesses do. For those curious in such matters, I may here add, that the order of the Theresian chanoinesses is a rich, gold, enamelled medallion, on the one side of which is represented the immaculate Virgin, and on the other side are the initials of the imperial foundress. The medallion worn by the ladies of the older Stift, on one side represents the guardian angel with the child, its hand extended heavenwards, and bearing the motto, "God alone;" on the other side, the patron saint of Bohemia, St. John Nepamuck, is represented, holding the picture of the crucified Saviour in his hand, and wearing on his breast the Virgin of Brandeis (from a painting in that old Bohemian town). The motto on this side is "A Bond of Salvation." The landed estates and other properties of the Theresian institution are managed by a committee of noblemen and high functionaries, called the "Stifts-Hofcommissäre," and at the head of them is the chief political personage in Bohemia, the "Oberst burg-graf" for the time being.

When canonesses marry, they receive from the funds of their institutions a moderate dowry for their outfit. But this only on condition that they do not unite themselves to men not of noble birth. The installation of a canoness, when she receives the insignia and a kiss from each of her sisters, is in part a religious ceremony. She must solemnly vow to obey the rules of the institution. On her death, or resignation, the insignia are returned to the superior, to be given to her successor.

Besides the Stifte in Prague, of which some account has been given, there are three more establishments in the Austrian empire; viz., one in Vienna, one in Innsprück, and one in Brünn. Considerably more members belong to the last than to any of the other institutions. But many of them are merely honorary canonesses, who have only the rank, without revenues and the advantages of residence. There are likewise canonesses connected with some property near the town of Hall, in Tyrol, who have rank and revenues, but no house to reside in. There are no institutions of canonesses in Hungary. In various parts of Germany, as in Bavaria, Saxony, Hanover, Prussia, Schleswig-Holstein, and in Denmark, are institutions similar in character to those in Austria. Some of them are of very old standing, and those in northern Germany are mostly Protestant. Whether they have been originally founded by members of noble families or of royal houses, they have all been sanctioned by the rulers of the states to which they belong, and all canonesses enjoy advantages and rank like those in Austria.

THE DOWAGER COUNTESS.

PART II

V.

THE night of the Dowager Countess's grand rout was in future to be known as the night of THE EARTHQUAKE,—or rather of the second shock; for a first agitation of the earth,—so it was generally maintained,—had occurred exactly four weeks earlier in the year. The previous shock, however, had been of a very slight and unalarming nature in comparison with the severity,—or what terror magnified into the severity,—of the second upheaving. And now a prophetic cry of a very formidable kind rung forth: a most multitudinous echo, as it were, of the awe-stricken moans of Lady Dangerfield, as she lay swooning on the floor of her drawing-room. It was whispered faintly at first in dark corners and private places; presently it was shouted clamorously in the full face of day,—publicly proclaimed from the house-tops. The muttered suspicions of the quidnuncs became the confirmed and bruited conviction of the whole nation. “Beware of the third shock!” went the universal chorus. The second shock had been four weeks after the first: the third shock would for certain, it was predicted, be four weeks after the second. There was a chance that the interval might be a calendar, instead of a lunar, month. By which calculation the world's destruction would be deferred for some three days, perhaps; just as payment of a bill of exchange is not demandable until after the expiry of a certain term “of grace,” as it is called. But more was not to be counted on. And the destruction of the world was certain, said the seers. The earthquake would gather force somewhat after a system of arithmetical progression. The second shock had been more violent than the first; the third would be so much more terrific than the second that it was vain to think of an afterwards in regard to it. None might hope to survive the direful calamity that was impending. “The globe has had notice to quit,” said a wag at White's. “How are we to get post-chaises to another planet?” For there were people who could even crack jokes at such a crisis. But then there have always been callous and irreclaimable jesters. A book might be made of the “good things” uttered on the scaffold by the condemned in presence of their doom. And in the instance under mention many of the jests, probably, proceeded from very quivering lips,—were but efforts to laugh away alarms entertained by the jester quite as much as by any one else.

With all the exaggeration and extravagance that were rife, certain indisputable facts need to be strictly stated. There had been an earthquake. Of that there could be no question at all. "In the night between Wednesday and Thursday last," Mr. Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann, "the earth had a shivering fit between one and two. . . . I had been awake, and had scarcely dozed again,—on a sudden I felt my bolster lift up my head. I thought somebody was getting from under my bed, but soon found it was a strong earthquake, that lasted nearly half a minute, with a violent vibration and great roaring. I rang the bell; my servant came in frightened out of his senses; in an instant we heard all the windows in the neighbourhood flung up. I got up, and found people running into the streets, but saw no mischief done. There has been some: two old houses flung down, several chimneys, and much china-ware. The bells rung in several houses." "The shock," says Smollett, who was in London at the time, "consisted of repeated vibrations, which lasted some seconds, and violently shook every house from top to bottom. Many persons started from their beds and ran to their doors and windows in dismay." Abundant evidence of this kind could be adduced if it were necessary.

The Dowager Countess was very ill indeed after her rout, and its strange and sudden dispersion. Her sufferings were rather mental than physical, however. The doctors were called in, and with professional pertinacity endeavoured to minister to a mind diseased. Panic was the real name for her ladyship's complaint. It was hardly to be remedied by recourse to the most precious appliances of the Pharmacopeia. Her medical attendants bled the lady copiously. She was not much the better for the operation. Perhaps rather the worse.

Still she would not keep her room. She could hardly be prevailed upon to remain quiet for two minutes together. A feverish restlessness possessed her. She paced the floor; she sat down and rose up again; she wandered from room to room of her mansion. She ordered her coach; then countermanded the order; then ordered it again. She proceeded to Chelsea to listen to the preaching of Mr. Whitfield at the house of his chief patroness, my Lady Huntingdon. It had lately become the vogue to attend the ministrations of Mr. Whitfield. "That apostolical person," as my Lord Bolingbroke had designated him, was now attracting even more crowded audiences than Mr. Garrick at Drury Lane. My Lord Chesterfield, my Lord Bath, my Lady Thanet, my Lady Townshend, and other of the most eminent personages of the time, had been to hear Mr. Whitfield. But what had been done from a perfunctory regard for fashion in the first instance, was now performed out of pure fear. The destruction of the world being now so imminent,—as all the world declared it was,—it was deemed very advisable to be on good terms with

Mr. Whitfield, who had long spoken of the approaching catastrophe openly and fearlessly, as though he possessed intimate acquaintance and relations with it. A sort of wild notion prevailed that the famous preacher might be able, if he chose to exert his influence, to secure for those who had notoriously shown themselves his friends and followers some special favour from the destroying angel.

Lady Dangerfield, however, did not derive much satisfaction from the discourse of Mr. Whitfield. He had been severely comminatory, —almost vindictively so, as she fancied. He had dealt out doom with a liberal hand to all classes alike. If anything, he had been more denunciatory of people in her ladyship's exalted position, than of any other. She returned home trembling so that she could scarcely stand. She stripped off her finery, and attired herself in a sack of erape, but very slightly trimmed with bugles. She washed so much of the red paint from her cheeks, that she looked almost like a ghost of her former self.

Still her ladyship's temper was not much bettered, nor more than usually under control. The old Adam,—or perhaps we should rather say the old Eve,—was not eradicated. The Countess so far forgot herself as to swear at her maid, and she even attempted to slap Lady Barbara. It was but a feebly directed and palsied kind of blow, however. Bab had been able to avoid it without much difficulty. The grand-daughter had suggested that certain of the Countess's male relations should be sent for, and had even been so amazingly indiscreet as to mention the name of Captain Brabazon. The grandmother's wrath had been excessive.

For Bab, she was terribly frightened, but in a vague, childish, unreasoning kind of way; rather because she saw those about her frightened, than that she could herself perceive any real cause for alarm. Indeed, she felt that earthquake or no earthquake, if she could but have had her swarthy cousin the Captain by her side, her fears would be greatly dissipated. But that was out of the question. Harry Brabazon was forbidden the house. And, as we have shown, she had been nearly slapped by her granddam for thoughtlessly letting fall his name.

In this regard, therefore, she felt very miserable, and much inclined to cry. And certainly the Countess's conduct was very trying. She scolded her grandchild and all about her upon very slight occasion. She was so disturbed and discomfited herself that she seemed determined everybody else should be reduced to a like condition. She shivered with fear one moment, and the next was quivering with anger. She was now muttering prayers, and again she was screaming imprecations. She was now weak, now strong; now sick, now well again. She would sit down to cribbage quite quietly; then suddenly she would fiercely fling away the cards, and ring for her prayer-book or a volume of sermons. Poor, cowed, bewildered Bab was

compelled to read aloud dry, if precious, pages of divinity until her voice died away in her throat from sheer exhaustion, or she was relieved from this task to take a hand at quadrille until her dimmed eyes could scarcely discern one card from another. It was noticeable that the Countess was never so urgent in her need of Tillotson's sermons as when the luck at cards had gone against her. Tillotson had been found with some difficulty by the Countess's librarian. The book was very dusty, and had not, it was clear, been removed from its shelf for a very considerable period,—fifty years, let us say. Lady Dangerfield's course of reading had not been wont to take a serious or devout direction. Now, however, nothing but sermons would content her; and she sent down to the kitchen a large stock of plays, novels, and frivolous literature, for the cook to light the fire with. She had no further need of the trash, she stated, and, indeed, loathed the very sight of it.

And yet it wanted some weeks of the time fixed for the third shock of the earthquake. Bab began to count and tell off the days, perhaps rather with hope than with dread. The Countess's conduct was becoming so unbearable. One by one the servants gave warning and quitted the house. They could not live, they alleged, with a lady who "went on" as the Dowager Countess had been going on. Their places were not filled up. What availed it to engage new attendants, to make any sort of arrangements for a future on earth, when it was so manifest that in a very little while there would be no earth at all to speak of; or, at any rate, no soul alive upon it? Yet the Countess scolded her butler well, taxing him with ruinous extravagance, for having opened a bottle of her best Burgundy. She still wished it be reserved for great festal occasions. Upon her own calculation there was not much time for them.

"Let the earthquake come then," thought Lady Bab, though in no very defined way; "at least, it will end this dreadful condition of things." For she felt, with the servants, that the Countess's goings on were more than could be borne. Only she longed to see Harry Brabazon again. And often her pretty, pale face was to be seen peering from the windows of the great house in St. James's Square, on the watch for that stalwart officer. She did not see him, however. He never came, or she was not at the window; was busy in obeying her grandmother's behests, when he happened to be passing. Once, indeed, she fancied she caught sight of a gentleman in a scarlet uniform quitting the square, who looked to possess something of the figure and bold bearing of the Captain. But she couldn't be sure about it. "Why did he not wait but a minute longer?" she asked herself. "Why isn't he more patient? And yet impatience seems to become a man somehow. I wouldn't have him different. But if he loves me,—as he says he does, and as I love him,—would he not wait and watch the windows for a little from the outside, as I watch from

the in? I think he would. But if he'd only come back for a minute, I'd forgive him for not waiting. What could he do, indeed, that I couldn't forgive?"

Some things grow the stronger for being pruned and lopped. Bab's love for her cousin fed somehow upon her grandmother's opposition to it. The seeds of love had struck deep in her young heart, had thriven greatly, and promised to bear rich fruit in due season.

Once, moreover, it seemed to Bab she had heard her cousin's voice. She now occupied the chamber of the Countess, and passed many disturbed nights in attendance upon her aged and suffering relative. Early one morning she had been roused by a loud cry in the square without. It should have proceeded from the watchman; but the watchman's tones were harsher, huskier, by a great deal. "Past two o'clock, and an earthquaky morning!" It was Harry's voice Bab felt convinced. There was a firm, military ring about it. She had heard the Captain command his company in the park, shouting in much the same way. "Past two o'clock, and an earthquaky morning!" The Dowager Countess heard the cry too, and groaned aloud, turning restlessly, and thumping her pillow in terrible perturbation of mind. "The third shock!" she cried.

But the four weeks had not yet expired.

VI.

It is not to be supposed, however, that the Dowager Countess was much more frightened than her neighbours. The alarm was general. It pervaded the whole social system, spreading from rank to rank rapidly and surely as an infectious malady. Indeed the doctors began to regard it in that light, and at last, after their manner, found a name for it,—*"Epidemic Terror."*

Her ladyship had always been inclined to vehemence of demonstration, so that now she manifested her dismay more positively than many. She possessed some strength of mind, or was reputed to be so endowed, but hardly to an extent sufficient to enable her to master her emotions of alarm. So, as it seemed, she threw her mental force into the scale of her fears, and was more strongly and thoroughly terrified than the rest of the world. Feebler folk exhibited their timidity in a weaker and dimmer way. Upon a cry of "thieves!" there are some people who can but simply cower and shiver under the bed-clothes, speechless, holding their breath. Others, equally frightened, but of robuster constitution, are able to sit up and emit wild screams of "murder!" Her ladyship pertained to this last-mentioned class. Her consternation was obstreperously expressed. It is only deep waters you can stir into waves: puddles can but be rippled.

Lady Betty Laxford stepped from her chair in the hall of the house in St. James's Square, and paid a visit to Lady Dangerfield.

"Isn't it awful, my dear Countess! There's no mistake about it. The world's to come to an end on Thursday, the 5th of April. We may be reprieved to Sunday, the 8th; but there's no relying on it. And I'd a thousand things to do. I begin to think what a wicked woman I've been all my life. Not that there's so very much to be laid to my charge. At least, there's a many I wot of in a much worse plight. Still, I should have liked a little longer time for preparation, if it had been only to put things to rights a bit and pay my tradesmen what I owe them. Not that, poor things, the money will be much avail to them where they're going to,—where we're all going to. Heaven knows where that is! I fear the worst, of course. One always does in these cases. The very thought makes me goose-flesh all over. You're not looking very well, Countess. A cough only? Try some ground-ivy tea,—do now,—a quarter of a pint at breakfast and as much going to bed. Her grace of Portland is a wonderful friend to it. Or two or three snails boiled in barley-water. I've known it work marvels. Only persist for a few weeks,—a few weeks! Good luck! how I talk! What will have become of us all in a few weeks? We shall be swallowed up by the earth like so many pills. Heigh-ho! I wish I was wicked, and didn't care. Or I wish I was good, and prepared. But I'm young still, and have a good complexion by candle-light,—so my friends tell me—I'm a trifle yellow in the day-time, I don't mind owning; and I do feel it very hard to be snuffed out, like a candle, all on a sudden. One thing, we shall all go together. Earthquakes don't pick and choose much, I take it."

Lady Betty's converse did not afford much comfort to the Dowager Countess. She groaned aloud. But Lady Betty was a good talker. She was frightened in her way. But her fears seemed to make her, as it were, effervesce into speech. She had much to say, and perhaps she felt that, according to the general showing, she had but little time to say it in, and must therefore make the most of her restricted opportunities. So she chatted on in an exuberant, half-hysterical way: wildly and incoherently, and quite unconscious of the disordered and distressed condition to which the Dowager Countess was now reduced.

"But a handful of people at the ridotto last night. And they say there are to be no more masquerades this season. Never any more, I suppose that means. And the theatre's quite deserted,—that is, almost; for I own we made up a party the other night to see Garrick in Fribble. I didn't like to miss him. The wretch mimics so many of one's friends so delightfully. I longed to hug him. A tragedy I couldn't have borne. Sure, one's got miseries and mortifications enough to bear as it is. And just now my nerves are like fiddle-strings. I'm ready to scream at the least touch. La! where shall we all be, and what shall we all be doing, this day month, I wonder! Isn't it dreadful to

think of, Countess? You never mean to stop in town, do you, my dear?"

"Does it matter where we are overtaken,—town or country?" demanded Lady Dangerfield, in a sepulchral tone. "Do you think you can fly from Providence?"

"You make me shiver, I vow. That's just Whitfield's awful way. But I shall go in the country,—and so will most of the quality. Somehow the country don't seem so wicked as the town, and I feel myself almost good when I get amongst green fields, out of the sight and the talk of cards, the park, and the playhouses. And then, my dear, it will be safer. One will be out of the way of the falling houses,—if they are to fall."

"But there are houses in the country, I suppose."

"But not so many of them. There's quite a large party of us going,—all people of the highest fashion, I assure you. We've hired a quiet country inn, five miles from town, on the northern road. We shall be dull, perhaps; but, you know, we can play at brag, if we find we can't pass the time in any other way."

"And the inn roof will fall in, and crush you all as you sit at table!"

"Gracious! don't talk like that. We shall sit out of doors when the time comes,—all night, if need be. We're making earthquake-gowns on purpose."

"For shrouds?"

"Mercy on us, what a dreadful notion! Don't speak of shrouds, or I shall faint, I vow. Earthquake-gowns are quite the vogue. White flannel, trimmed with pink ribbons, with a train. They're not unbecoming; and vastly comfortable for out of doors."

"And do you think the coming judgment is to be escaped in this way?"

"I must go, Countess. You frighten me to death. I can't bear to hear such dreadful words. And I've half a hundred visits to pay. Good-bye. Mind you go away, and take my pretty Bab with you. The poor child looks but pale and pining. I don't wonder at it, I'm sure. I feel worn to a threadpaper myself. But I shall get quit of London, if it's only to give myself a chance of safety. I don't want to have a gang of common fellows searching and fishing for my poor bones among the rubbish. There's plenty saying they leave town only because it such fine weather for the country. But I go down plainly because I'm a coward, and want to keep a whole skin, if I can. Good-bye. Please God, we may all be as well as we are now this day month!"

The Dowager Countess had other visitors, whose talk did not greatly differ in regard to tone and topic from Lady Betty's. The most frivolous people were awed into seriousness for the nonce, although strength of habit, of course, asserted itself, and after five

minutes of gravity they were apt to decline suddenly into giddiness, to revert presently, with a start, to their earlier and more solemn condition of mind. Indeed their airs of earnestness were most sadly leavened with levity. Devout utterances were intermingled with the idlest sallies. Now they desponded, and now they giggled. Fans fluttered, and snuff-boxes closed with a snap, and silks and satins rustled and crackled, as lamentations arose on all sides, and desperate forebodings of approaching doom were in every one's mouth. The expediency of leaving London was greatly discussed; and "earthquake gowns" and the general doctrine of "judgments" alternately figured in the conversation.

Meanwhile, to meet the materialist opinion in regard to "epidemic terror" which medicine had initiated, divinity stirred itself, with the view of asserting the Church's right to share in, possibly to benefit by, the general commotion. The pulpit and the press poured forth sermons and exhortations in great abundance. Secker, Bishop of Oxford, besought all good Christians not to hurry from their homes, but to await Heaven's good pleasure prayerfully and patiently. The advice was prompted by his lordship's fear of losing his Easter offerings, avowed sceptical critics. Sherlock, Bishop of London, followed suit in a pastoral letter, improving the occasion. Ten thousand copies were sold in two days, and fifty thousand were subscribed for after the exhaustion of the first two editions. And never was there a sermon or a pamphlet published on the subject of the coming earthquake but a copy was sent to the Countess's house in St. James's Square, and laid upon her table. The publications were directed for the most part in what looked like a feigned hand, which yet, so Lady Barbara fancied, bore some resemblance to the writing of her cousin Harry. Yet why, she asked herself, should Captain Brabazon be troubling himself in the matter? What was it to him?

And then the general convulsion, the prevailing state of panic, was not without preposterous incidents, at which the world would surely have laughed loudly at any other time,—its courage a trifle less undermined and shattered. Turner, the famous china-man in Pall Mall, was demanding twenty guineas for a jar he had asked but ten for a week earlier. And now it was cracked,—but cracked by the earthquake, as he declared! "The only jar in Europe that has been cracked by an earthquake! Well worth twenty guineas. You see the thing's unique!" he explained.

Then, one day, there were hundreds of people crowding to Edmon-ton,—the Dowager Countess among them. There was reported to be on view there a hen which had recently laid an egg, with, inscribed on it in capital letters, the legend, "Beware of the third shock!"

VII.

It was within a few days of the date fixed for the great catastrophe. The "stampede," as it would now be called, had been something wonderful. Some seven hundred and thirty coaches, carrying whole families into the country, had been counted passing Hyde Park Corner within three days. "Read's Weekly Journal" informed the public that "thirty coaches, filled with genteel-looking people, were, at Wednesday noon, at Slough, running away from the prognosticated earthquake;" adding, "and it is known that thirty-four p—rs, ninety-four c—rs, and two p—ds of —, fled to different parts of the kingdom this week on the same account, in order to avoid the vengeance denounced against them by a late pastoral letter."

As yet, however, the Dowager Countess had not followed the fashion and quitted her house in town. Something perhaps of the old indomitable spirit of her race remained to her. Terribly blanched and harassed, she was still possessed with a notion of holding her own against all foes,—of dying, if it must be so: but not until she had made a fair show of fighting,—of standing to her guns, as it were,—even though her fortress was beleaguered by an earthquake. It was perhaps when she had been well fortified, by recourse to strong waters, that she inclined more particularly to these determined opinions; and of late, it must be owned, her ladyship's applications to the spirit-store in her closet had been frequent and extensive. But then she was, as we have shown, a lady advanced in years, and age needs stimulative sustenance, especially under such trying conditions as Lady Dangerfield was now subjected to,—her ladyship, it must be remembered, having been proclaimed, on all hands, to be no longer the woman she had been. She had been carried in her chair to the Mall,—now almost deserted by the quality,—and, leaning upon the arm of her grandchild, had paced for a while up and down that pleasant, gravelled, tree-shadowed promenade. She had felt the need of fresh air and some change of scene, for her house had become, for the moment, unbearable to her,—and indeed, altogether, her ladyship wore an infirm and strangely altered look.

At one end of the Mall was assembled a little knot of persons, gradually augmented by idlers, until it became a considerable throng. Lady Dangerfield's attention was attracted by the gathering. As she approached to ascertain its cause she perceived in the midst the figure of a private soldier in the uniform of the Guards, mounted upon a bench, engaged in the delivery of a speech. Soon there rang upon her ladyship's startled ears the sound of the now familiar words, "Beware of the third shock!" Frightened, and yet fascinated, she drew nearer.

"Louder, my man, and don't mince your words," said a dark-complexioned officer standing by, and he tossed the man a crown.

The assembly was for the most sympathetic with the preacher, allowing for the presence, here and there, of the scoffer and the sceptic, to be discerned in all congregations.

The preacher was a wild-looking man, with rolling eyes and dishevelled dress. He had loosened his cravat and belts, and unbuttoned his coat, on account of the heat and for his greater ease in speaking. His gestures were animated to extravagance. His language was of the most frenzied kind. His text was the earthquake; and he spoke of it, and the effects to be expected from it, after a manner that was at once simple and horrible. Stimulated by the attention of his auditors, and possibly also by the crown tendered by his officer, his eloquence, as he proceeded, grew more and more inflammatory, soared to higher elevations. He drew a garishly-coloured picture of the impending doom,—the swallowing up of the whole metropolis, and the destruction of its inhabitants to the last man of them. He called attention to the Abbey towers in front, picturesque on the horizon, and prophesied their speedy downfall, burying all beneath them, and utter disappearance for ever. Of the entire city, he foretold, not one stone would be left upon another, nor one living soul remain to contemplate the scene of devastation. Something as, almost a century earlier, Solomon Eagle had preached during the great plague and fire, did this private soldier deliver himself in the Mall for the edification and warning of his audience.

The Countess, trembling all over, listened like one entranced.

Captain Brabazon availed himself of the opportunity to approach Lady Barbara, and whisper in her ear.

"Fear nothing, Bab. The world's mad, that's all. Whatever happens, I'll be by your side. If you remain, I remain. If you go, I go. I wear the pompon next my heart still. That's my talisman. I shall be near thee always. No harm shall come to thee. I love thee, darling, ever. I dare say no more now." And he was gone.

The preacher had stopped; rather it appeared, however, from lack of breath than exhaustion of matter. Panting, he dabbed his wet forehead, and arranged somewhat his tumbled dress.

The Countess nervously forced her way through the crowd. Hurriedly she pressed her purse into the hand of the soldier. For a moment he glared at her with bloodshot, insane eyes.

"Hag!" he cried at the top of his voice, "do you think you can buy salvation with gold and silver? Hence! It is you, and such as you, who have brought this judgment upon us!" And he levelled at her a volley of denunciations and imprecations the more dreadful from the sort of parody of scriptural phraseology in which they were couched.

"Take me home!" gasped Lady Dangerfield, clutching her grand-

child's arm. "Find my chair. I feel faint. Let me get home. I shall die if I stay longer. Heaven knows what's to become of us all! We must quit London, Bab! Oh, that I had never seen this city of iniquity!"

And she hurried from the Mall.

Immediately afterwards a file of the Guards appeared upon the scene.

"Arrest that scoundrel," said the officer in command. It was my Lord Delawar. The preacher was forthwith haled down and pinioned. "But that I deem he's fitter for Bedlam than any other place, I'd have the rogue flogged straightway."

The preacher, who was certainly insane, surrendered without opposition. Indeed his sense of military duty for the moment made way through his madness, and asserted itself curiously. He drew himself up stiffly and formally saluted his officer, before he fell into the ranks as a prisoner.

A decent-looking woman came forward. She had been sitting quietly on the bench in charge of the preacher's bayonet and car-touche-box.

"Don't harm him, my lord," she said, with a courtesy. "He didn't mean any wrong. I'm his wife, and ought to know. They say he's mad, but indeed he isn't. If your lordship could get any sensible man to examine him you would find him quite in his right mind."

"Stand back, good dame," said his lordship, with a laugh. What could he do but laugh? "Quick march!"

VIII.

The Londoners' only chance of safety consisted in "camping out." That was the prevalent opinion. A sort of compromise was to be effected with the earthquake. It was to take the town, and spare the country. The citizens had, as it were, capitulated upon terms securing to them something of the honours of war. They abandoned their city to be pillaged and laid waste by natural convulsion, while they were permitted to march forth assured in some degree of personal safety, and possessed of such small chattels of value as they could carry with them.

All the roads leading from town were crowded with the retreating army of Londoners. The quality were in chairs and carriages; the citizens in gigs and carts and stage coaches; the humbler folks trudged wearily on foot. The open fields without the walls of the metropolis were filled with an extraordinary assembly of all classes. They were as the spectators of some grand show; particularly interested in its results because they could not be quite certain that they might not at any moment be required to relinquish passivity and take an active share in its incidents. It was as a bull-fight, at which upon very short notice any one happening to be present might

be imperatively required to descend into the arena and assume the perilous part of matador.

There was notable exhibition of alarm undoubtedly. Yet a certain show of courage is not incompatible even with the existence of such a panic-driven crowd as we have here under mention. Each individual is buoyed up by a kind of belief that however much the safety of his neighbours may be menaced, a fair chance exists nevertheless of his own preservation. So, altogether, the conduct of the congregation was not so indecorous as might have been anticipated. With all the fear and trembling there was yet considerable aspect of composure. The general attitude was one of waiting. The dire event which had been foretold was to occur within four-and-twenty hours, or, upon the most liberal calculation, within a period of some four days,—that is to say, between the Thursday, the 5th of April, and Sunday, the 8th. If nothing happened in that time it seemed to be the general opinion that people might safely return home and resume their ordinary course of life. Still it was also the general opinion that something, of a more or less awful character, would certainly happen in that time. Meanwhile, however, it was the duty of all to wait the issue of events, and to endure the agony of suspense with such serenity as was possible under the circumstances.

Such a general system of camping out, however, brought with it, of course, its camp-followers : a somewhat noisy and troublesome troop. There were shoe-blacks, link-boys, ballad-singers, and vendors of oranges and other fruits and articles of food. An open-air concourse in England involves many of the characteristics of a fair. There were people bound to turn the indispensable penny, even though the destruction of the globe was imminent. The partnership of hand and mouth cannot afford any suspension, however momentary, of the intercourse and understanding that should subsist between the members of the firm. So there was much plying of trades for a living, albeit the probability of the cessation of life altogether was universally averred to be very instant.

Science did not help people much. The savans were inclined to ascribe the strange situation of affairs vaguely to electricity. "Just as," Walpole wrote on the subject to a friend, "formerly, everything was accounted for by Descartes's vortices, and Sir Isaac Newton's gravitation." The opinion did not satisfy the general, who for the most part affected the less impugnable argument of a "judgment." The rector of St. Andrew's, Holborn, showed himself stoutly on the occasion. Influential female parishioners had besought him to devote prayers in his parish church against the coming shock. He excused himself on the ground of a severe cold, and said coolly : "Besides, you can go, if you list, to St. James's Church, and hear the Bishop of Oxford preach there all night long about earthquakes."

Lady Dangerfield had secured rooms at a somewhat squalid little

tavern in the neighbourhood of Highgate, and, clad in an earthquake gown of substantial fabric and hideous device, awaited on the summit of the hill the utter destruction of the distant city,—vaguely discernible on the horizon,—a cloudy panorama of buildings, towers, and spires, crowned by the great mist-encircled dome of St. Paul's. Lady Barbara, of course, accompanied her grandmother, and was made useful in many ways; as a crutch to support the tottering limbs of the elder lady; as a cushion to be leant against, and pushed, and thumped into shape accordingly as the comfort of the invalid seemed to require, as her temper was fretted, or she needed occupation; as a whipping-boy, or whipping-girl rather, if the term be permissible, to suffer vicariously for the many transgressions of the past, that now burthened the memory and morbidly disquieted the conscience of the self-accusing Countess. Quite apart from all thought of the earthquake, the time was an acutely trying one for poor Lady Bab. The child did her best to tend and soothe her imperious and unreasoning relative. Until her arms ached and numbed, she upheld her granddam's shaking frame and feeble gait. Each moment some new service was demanded of her. She dared not quit her post for a second. Every requirement of the Dowager's she was expected to meet and satisfy forthwith, if not, indeed, to anticipate: to bathe her aching, wrinkled brows; to fan her if the heat oppressed her; to wrap her round more securely if the damps and chills of evening brought suggestions of rheumatic agonies; to read to her; to pray with and for her; to ply her well, when her strength declined, or symptoms of nervous distress became very pronounced, with some selections from the ample stock of stimulants which her ladyship had brought with her from town in her chariot, such as aniseed, cinnamon, citron, and Barbadoes-water, ratifia,—“the most noble spirit of Clary,”—and other notable restoratives, upon which the fashion of the period had set its approving seal. Poor Lady Barbara! she was fairly worn-out with the severity of the duties that had devolved upon her. And no word of gratitude rewarded her for all her earnest toil and painstaking. Even the sight of her anxious pale young face, was a cause of offence to the Countess, who indeed scolded her for looking so ill, reproached her for her feebleness, charged her with affectation, when she was near fainting from fatigue incurred on behalf of the cross and crazed old woman. Fortunately, perhaps, the Dowager's frequent applications to the potent restoratives she had supplied herself with, resulted at last in her sinking into a comatose state. Her form drooped and sunk upon the pillows arranged for her support; her eyelids lowered, and her head nodded.

A hand was laid upon Bab's arm. She turned, and found Lady Betty Laxford beside her.

“Hush! I've come to relieve guard. She's killing you, my poor child. It musn't be, earthquake or no earthquake. I'm terribly

frightened, but I haven't quite lost my wits yet. I won't answer for what may happen before we've done with this dreadful business. Go, Bab, my dear; look behind yonder furze-bush. You'll chance to find a friend there."

Before Bab could reach the furze-bush, she was met by Captain Brabazon.

"I can bear it no more, Bab," he said; "you've been a victim and a slave long enough. How pale and pinched and ill you look, my poor darling! I'll have no more of this. It quite maddens me. It sets my heart aching more than I can bear. This way, Bab."

"What would you with me, cousin?"

"Release you from the tyranny of that crack-brained old harridan."

He led her to where a coach with four horses was standing. The steps were flung down. He lifted his hat as he proffered his hand to assist her in mounting to the lofty vehicle. She hesitated, trembling, and turned towards him a white, quivering, inquiring face.

"Trust me, sweetheart," he said simply.

"Dear Harry, only be good to me!" She burst into tears, and sobbed upon his breast, flinging her arms round his neck.

"Is there a creature living,—save only yon mad she-cat,—could do thee harm, dearest one?" he said. "To town." This was to his coachman, who wore a certain soldierly look. He was, in truth, a private in the Captain's company of Guards.

"To town?" repeated Bab, opening wide her blue eyes. "But the earthquake?"

"The earthquake's all fiddlesticks," said the Captain. His blunt delivery on that subject appeased Bab's fears with curious promptness.

"Oh, Harry," she said presently, "I feel so happy sitting with thee here. You love me, cousin? Do I love thee, dost ask? Surely I do. Is there need to doubt it? My brave, true Harry! I love thee, Harry, and I'm happy; and yet I am trembling and crying the while, and feel like to swoon! But I was ever weak and foolish, as you know. I needed your strong arm to sustain me. But how could you ever find the courage to take me from my grandmother? What will she say? What will she do? Were she to see me here, Harry, she would kill me!"

"She shall kill me first. And I take some killing, I warrant."

"But where are we hurrying?"

"Dearest Bab! one of the chaplains of the Fleet shall make us man and wife ere an hour has sped. They're famous forgers of the bonds of Hymen, though I've seen worthier blacksmiths."

"Harry, I dare not."

"This earthquake stuff still scares thee? Nay, I'll not have thee frightened. My godless grand-aunt has worked wickedness enough of that kind already. We'll not re-enter town then. We'll turn the horses' heads toward the north, and cross the Tweed. One of the

priests of the border shall marry us, if thou wilt have it so, pretty one. I'll grudge nothing,—not even delay in making thee mine,—that tends to thy greater happiness."

"Oh, Harry, take me back. You must, cousin, indeed you must," cried Bab, after a pause.

He was startled at the strange earnestness of her beseeching.

"I cannot leave her, Harry. I must do my duty, cousin. You would not have me deemed wicked, cruel, heartless?"

"None dare think so of thee, Bab."

"All will, Harry; and they will think rightly, if I quit her now, at this moment of all others. She is very old, strangely feeble, terribly downcast, just now, with excess of fear and sickness. My place is at her side. Bethink, thee, she is almost my only living relative. My parents both have been taken from me, as you know. I have borne with her vexing humours a long while, but surely I should have patience to bear with them only a little longer, it may be! I have thought her cruel——"

"And she has been cruel indeed to thee, Bab," muttered the Captain, with an oath.

"But she may have meant kindly by me. Let us try to think so. Indeed, it will be best. And she is not always so harsh to me as she hath been of late. And however she may have sinned against me, is it for me to pay her back trespasses at such a time? Take me to her."

"It shall be as you will, Bab," quoth the Captain, with a sigh.

"And you're not angry with me, cousin?"

"Can I be angry with an angel? Ah, Bab! if all preachers had thy tender persuasive way, there'd be fewer sinners to be frightened into righteousness by earthquakes and such dreadful matters!"

The coach was turned, and slowly climbed the hill again.

Lady Betty had grown alarmed at last, finding the Countess remain for so long a time quite still and speechless. Upon examination it was found that the poor lady was insensible. There was froth upon her lips, and a drawn look on one side of her face, symptomatic of a paralytic seizure.

"Quick, a surgeon!" cried Lady Betty. "Is there no one present who can breathe a vein?"

Medical aid was forthcoming. It was held advisable that the Countess should be borne within doors. She had not missed her grand-daughter. She was never indeed to know of Lady Barbara's brief absence: her flight with her lover, and her return to her duty.

IX.

For some days the Countess lay at Highgate, in the dingy bed-room of a road-side inn. She was insensible,—motionless,—and could give utterance to no articulate sounds.

Early in the ensuing week she was carried back to St. James's Square. She bore the journey tolerably well. But the town physicians at once declared that her ladyship's recovery was not to be looked for. It was only a question of a few days with her, they decided. Her constitution had wholly given way.

Lady Bab was constant in her attendance by the sick bed of her grandmother. She had not seen the Captain since the night of her short ride with him in the carriage towards town and a Fleet marriage. She was thinking of him fondly—and of her own troubles, and of the dying Countess—the sum of whose sins and failings death was gradually dimming and dissolving, so far as the vision of survivors was concerned.

It was nearly an hour past midnight. The taper burned very dimly. White as her draperies, and terribly worn with watching, looked poor little Lady Barbara. For a moment she closed her weary eyes, and sleep stole over her. She bowed her head upon her breast—then awoke with a scream, almost with a start.

Lady Dangerfield was sitting up in bed, staring at her grandchild with fixed glassy eyes,—“Where am I?” she demanded in a thick, muffled voice. It was the first time she had spoken since her seizure upon Highgate Hill.

“At home, in your own house, grandmamma.”

“Who brought me here? What's the day of the month?”

“The 12th of April, grandmamma.”

There was a pause.

“Then the 5th has passed? And the 8th? And—no earthquake?”

“No earthquake.”

“No earthquake! Then I've been made a fool of. We've all been made fools of. Why wasn't there an earthquake?”

To this query, Bab could find no suitable reply.

The Dowager Countess, with a groan, sank back in her bed, and turned her face to the wall. Bab re-arranged the disturbed coverings, and resumed her chair. Some time afterwards the taper flickered and went out. But there was no longer need of its light. Day had dawned. Bab opened the window-curtains ever so gently, to admit the first cheering rays of the sun. Then, something strange about the look of her grandmother's hand, as the light fell upon it lying open upon the coverlid, arrested her attention.

The Dowager Countess was dead.

The footsteps of the watchman, going his rounds without, were to be heard. “Past five o'clock, and a sunshiny morning!” She knew the voice.

She raised the window. Captain Brabazon stood below, gazing up at her.

“Harry!” she cried to him plaintively. “All is over!” There was a choke in her voice. She could say no more.

Her heart seemed overcharged with, wholly occupied by grief just then. Still, by-and-by, the comforting thought came to her, that she was not alone or uncared for in the world; that her Harry was true to her; and that she was free now to give him her love and her hand, without aid from the chaplains of the Fleet or the Tweed. Could she sorrow then so very much for the demise of the Dowager Countess? Indeed, the life of the late Lady Dangerfield had not been of a kind to justify much lamentation, on the part of any one, over her death.

"Be good to the dear little woman, and do your best to deserve the love of her whole heart, that she has given thee, Harry," said Lady Betty Laxford to the Captain. "Sure, what have you ever done to merit the happiness of wedding my sweet Bab, and what can she see in your roystering, guard-room airs, to think of taking thee for her husband? And yet, if she hadn't, I almost think I could have shown pity for thee myself, Captain; for I do believe there's an honest heart in that broad chest of yours, beating sturdily under your red coat. Try and deserve your good fortune, Harry; that's all you can do—really deserve it, you never will. Treat her tenderly, and love her all your life. We're strange creatures, we women, and we need a world of indulgence and forbearance. You must humour us, and pet us; we're but babies, at the best. And yet, for all our fancies and follies, our vapours, frights, faintings, monkeys, fashions, china, patches, washes, tattle, and impertinence, there's something of the angel about us too, if you'll only think so. Heigh-ho! How pleased and fond and silly you both look, and yet, you know, you should be miserable, seeing what's happened. I can't find heart to scold you, however, for looking so happy. Things are all upset, somehow. This comes of earthquakes! Well, they need not happen very often. The poor Countess!—I must wear crape, I suppose, though I look quite a wretch in black, always. Now she's gone, is there harm in my saying—no!—now she's gone, I'll bite my tongue off, rather than say anything against her! There, positively, if you two fools can't get on without kissing each other, I'll—turn my head away!"

The date of the demise of the Dowager Countess was remembered afterwards, so far as it was remembered at all, in connection with the time fixed for the Great Earthquake—which did not occur. But the Earthquake soon ceased to be a topic of conversation—was speedily, indeed, forgotten almost altogether. Folly does not long lie fallow; punctually produces fresh crops, with scarce the interval of a season between them; and needs little cultivation or labour to stimulate her natural fertility. In a very little while other subjects, quite as preposterous in their character, gave occupation and entertainment to the frivolous world of society.

MADAME DE MAINTENON.

It is difficult to approach the subject of Madame de Maintenon. We must esteem her, but our esteem stops short of love or admiration. Her story is one of the strangest of romances; but a romance without heroism and without passion.

She was born in the room of the warder of a gaol,—in the *conciergerie* of the prison of Niort; and she came to be Queen of France in all but the name. Her grandfather was the grim, rigorous, dauntless, plain-spoken Huguenot chief and poet, Agrippa d'Aubigné—as different a personage from his granddaughter as can well be imagined. Agrippa d'Aubigné had a son, Constant,—a reckless profligate,—the scandal and curse of this noble Huguenot family. He was a gambler and a drunkard from a boy, led early a vagabond life, went to Holland, lived dissolutely there, married a young creature without his father's consent, killed her by ill-treatment, lost twenty times over all he had in the world at play, abjured his religion and became a Catholic, ousted his father out of one of his own castles, made it a rendezvous for women of bad life, till the stern old Huguenot took it from him by surprise and with an armed force in the night. Then he turned Protestant again, to act as traitor and spy upon the Calvinist party. After which his father scorned him, renounced him for ever, and cut off his inheritance. Notwithstanding, the worthless scapegrace managed to marry the gentle daughter of a nobleman of Bordeaux, the whole of whose property he made away with, and then got imprisoned at Niort in Poitou, on account of a treacherous correspondence with the English Government. His faithful, sorrowful, loving wife had followed him to prison, and there Françoise d'Aubigné, afterwards Marquise de Maintenon,morganatic Queen of France, was born the 27th of November, 1635. The worthless Constant d'Aubigné got out of prison, and dragged his wife and family to Martinique, where he made a fortune, got rid of it again, and died, leaving Madame d'Aubigné and her children in extreme distress. Poor Madame d'Aubigné under such trials had grown a patient, reserved, joyless woman, spare even of caresses to her children, begotten amid such trials and tribulations. She returned to France, battled with poverty desperately, lived even and sustained her children with the work of her hands. Her life was of the saddest, and something of her sad spirit was inherited by the child who was destined to have no small share in the direction of the destinies of France.

A sister of Constant, Madame de Villette, had already, before the

departure of her brother for Martinique, taken charge of the little Françoise,—she now again took the child under her care,—but she was a Calvinist, and another aunt, a Madame de Neuillant, a Catholic, came and carried off triumphantly her little niece with an order of the court, and the grand-daughter of the old Huguenot, Agrippa, was converted into a Catholic. This Madame de Neuillant, with all her intense zeal for the spiritual welfare of her niece, was sordid, mean, and avaricious. She gave the child at first, it is true, an education in convents at Niort and Paris; but when little Françoise had grown up, and was left an orphan,—by the death of her mother,—she made her taste of all the bitterness of dependence, and kept her in a state of privation.

Nevertheless, Madame d'Aubigné, before her death, had taken her daughter a little into the world of Paris, and under Madame de Neuillant, Françoise had seen something of its best society. The young girl, with her quiet reserved beauty, large dark eyes, elegant form, and discreet and ready wit, had made an impression on all she met. "*La jeune Indienne*," as she was called, from her Martinique residence, was, from the first, considered a very noticeable person. And she gained upon acquaintance with most,—but so poor, alas! Once she cried on entering a room, and sat down on a chair, and hid her feet under her dress, which was too short for her. Alas! Even in these noble days, what were beauty, wit, and gentleness worth to a poor girl who had outgrown her only presentable dress?

And yet, perhaps, there never was a society in which wit, and the grace of manner, and expression possessed by Mademoiselle d'Aubigné was more capable of being appreciated. When she returned to Poitou after her first visit to Paris, her letters were handed about as models of style and expression. And a Chevalier de Méré, a bel esprit of the time, has left a record, in which he speaks of her, not only as beautiful, but "as gentle, faithful, modest, intelligent, and using only her wit to amuse and render herself beloved." Poor Mademoiselle d'Aubigné! Had she really loved and been beloved at this time, the severe and shrewd childless Madame de Maintenon would never have been heard of; but there would have lived in the world, perhaps, a true woman the more,—a model wife, and a faultless and devoted mother. However, the irony of destiny was never more apparent than in her case. This peerless and intelligent young beauty, who would have made a fit wife for the noblest prince in Europe, who was destined even at fifty to captivate the proudest of living monarchs, was obliged, from sheer poverty, to accept the hand of a hideously deformed and paralytic buffoon,—as repulsive to appearance as the squatting figure of a Chinese idol. The union of Minerva with Pan or Silenus would be less shocking to the imagination. What must she not have suffered? No wonder, then, in later years she said, if her body was opened her heart would be found, *sec et tors*, like that of M. de Louvois. "*J'aime mieux l'épouser qu'un*

convent," she said, and the resolution to make this sacrifice must have caused a convulsion to her system which paralysed the healthiest impulses of the heart for ever. Nevertheless, she now, as throughout life, devoured her grief in silence. Her manners, self-esteem, and strength of will, combined with circumstances in forming for her a patience, a power of suppression, and secret indefatigable tenacity of purpose, which has, perhaps, no parallel in history. And she could say later of her life at the court, where the ennui and daily troubles she had to support were immense and unceasing :—"J'ai été vingt-six ans sans dire un mot qui marquât le moindre chagrin."

Mademoiselle d'Aubigné had made her entry into the Parisian world at a time when French society was going through one of the greatest changes of modern times. A new idea of simplicity and elegance of social life had found birth amid a sort of common inspiration and conviction that both manners and language contained much that were rude and barbarous. The development of social refinement, which was cultivated in the salons of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, by a wondrous sympathetic co-operation of all that was distinguished in France, is one of the most curious events in history, and has helped to form the manners and forms of expression of every country in modern Europe. It was a great social movement.

Besides the brilliant assemblies of the Hôtel de Rambouillet,—into which Mademoiselle d'Aubigné early found entrance and admiration, and where she met with ladies like Madame de Sévigné, and others, who remained her friends for life,—there was another society which was hardly less significant of the general tendency of the time, which met at the house, and around the chair, of the distorted cripple and comic writer, Scarron. Here, too, nobles of the court would assemble for the sake of the art and conversation to be found there, though the tone of morality was necessarily less severe than that to be found in the salons of the "déesse d'Athènes." It was a society of joyous livers and free talkers, who would not be scandalised at the presence of Mesdemoiselles Marion de Lorme and Ninon de l'Enclos. Scarron, the presiding deity of this little salon in the Marais, had been doubled up and twisted by rheumatism and paralysis in such fashion that his knees nearly touched his chin, only his tongue and his brain remained in invincible activity, and his comic spirits never failed him to the last. Scarron was the first man of letters in France who had a salon of his own. At the Hôtel de Rambouillet it was the nobility who received the men of letters; at Scarron's it was the man of letters who received the nobility.

The burlesque poetry of Scarron has now little interest, though he was evidently a man of talent. His name would hardly now be often remembered, were it not for his strange marriage, which astonished the Parisian world in 1652.

Little Françoise d'Aubigné had, indeed, made a visit to Scarron's

house, at the age of fourteen, being introduced there in company with her mother, by her aunt Madame de Neuillant. Madame d'Aubigné had made a short visit to Paris on law affairs, and lived in the same street and opposite to Scarron, and it was in Scarron's house that the little provincial girl had cried about her shabby dress. Shortly after Françoise having returned to Poitou, found herself alone with a dead mother in a little room at Niort, and no resource but Madame de Neuillant, who then again affected to take charge of her orphan niece, and with her the young girl remained for a time, half clothed, badly lodged, and ill fed.

Some young girls of her age at Paris, however, remembered the little creole stranger—*La jeune Indienne*—and corresponded with her. Mademoiselle d'Aubigné's letters were handed about as models of grace and good writing; Scarron read one of them, remembered his bashful little visitor of a year back, took interest in her lonely fate, and wrote her a kind letter. The young girl was brought again to Paris by her aunt, and again visited Scarron. Scarron seeing her wretched condition, offered her money to enter a convent, which she rejected. Scarron then offered marriage, and was accepted. The marriage took place, when Françoise was seventeen years of age. When the marriage contract was drawn up, Scarron declared that he recognised in the bride, property to the amount of four livres of rent, two large mutinous eyes, a very good heart, a pair of pretty hands, and plenty of wit. When the notary asked Scarron what dowry he settled on her, he replied, "*Immortality: the names of the wives of kings die with them, that of Scarron's wife will live eternally.*" So poor was the bride, that her wedding dress was lent her by a friend.

La voilà! la jeune Indienne at seventeen years of age, in the first blush of beauty and grace, married to a cripple, and obliged to live among a society of gay livers, whose talk, as we have said, at times was of the freest. That she succeeded in making herself respected by such company, speaks wonderously for her precocious tact and self vigilance. Yet she held her own, and contributed her share to the general entertainment; in proof of which, we have on record the speech of the servant to her at a dinner one day when Scarron—who though he was often frightfully poor—entertained company. "*Encore une histoire, Madame; le rôti nous manque aujourd'hui.*" However, it was a hard apprenticeship of self-restraint; but perhaps her life then, after all, was not so hard as that she afterwards knew as the wife of Louis XIV. The worst that is known, indeed, of Madame Scarron at this time is, that she admitted Ninon de l'Enclos to her intimacy, and that Ninon in latter times talked about a certain "*chambre jaune*" in a mysterious way; yet still she confessed she knew nothing certain. But to excuse Madame Scarron from having formed such an acquaintance as Ninon, it must be remembered that Ninon, styled the Parisian *Leontium*, was treated as a privileged person

even by such ladies as Madame de Seigné, who encouraged her son to cultivate her society, for the sake of her grace! Nevertheless, be this as it may, it is difficult to fancy Madame de Maintenon ever young, or gay, or passionate; although she said indeed of herself, "that she was gay by nature and sad by profession," her natural gaiety was too early blighted in her to be at any time exuberant. And there is no trace that Madame de Maintenon ever had in her life a quicker rushing of the blood or a deep emotion of the heart at any time, which not a little chills the sympathies of all who have to deal with her story.

Scarron lived for eight years after his marriage, and his wife was left a widow at twenty-five. She never failed afterwards to speak of "ce pauvre estropié" as she called him, with a certain respect and esteem; but he had left her, for the time being at least, in as difficult a position as that in which he found her; perhaps, as *la veuve Scarron*, it was worse; he had enjoyed a pension from the queen-mother, but it died with him, and he had no property but his debts. Her friends applied to Mazarin to get Scarron's pension renewed in her favour; but he, remembering a satire of Scarron's against him, was inflexible. "Is the petitioner in good health?" he asked. "Yes." "Well, then, she cannot succeed a man whose health was bad."

Madame Scarron retired to a convent for awhile, where the *Maréchale d'Aumont*, a relative, lent her a room, and offered, at first, to supply all her wants; but the *Maréchale* thought proper to talk so ostentatiously of her charity to her poor relative, that the pride of the latter revolted at last, and she had a load of wood which had been deposited before her window for winter firing restacked in a cart, and sent back to the *Maréchale*.

This painful position lasted a year, when fortunately for Madame Scarron, Mazarin died, and Anne of Austria was induced to renew the pension of Scarron to his widow; indeed, by aid of a little diplomacy on the part of Madame Scarron at court, the pension was unconsciously doubled. Madame Scarron now took a room in the convent of the "Ursulines, de la rue Saint Jacques," where she had been once placed as a child, and mixed again with the Parisian world. Among her chief friends was the *Maréchale d'Albret*.

The wit and the tact, the gentle and discreet manners of Madame Scarron, made her society a necessity in the house of *Maréchale d'Albret*, and it was here that she met Madame de Montespan, her relationship with whom exercised so decisive an influence on her life; and it was here, too, that she met with the Princess des Ursins, whose destiny it was to be subsequently, and through Madame de Maintenon's influence, the female prime-minister of Spain. But the modest fortune which she had obtained was not destined to last. The queen-mother died, and Madame Scarron's pension was at an end also. She now received an offer of marriage from a rich but old and disreputable noble. This she refused, to the disgust of her

friends, and she again fell into a state of distress. After having vainly endeavoured to get her pension restored, she was on the point of following in the suite of the Princess de Nemours to Portugal, when a visit of adieu which she made to Madame de Montespan changed her future. The brilliant Madame de Montespan took an interest in the fate of her future rival, and through her interest the pension of Madame Scarron was restored.

The pension of Madame Scarron was thus renewed in 1666. At this time Louis XIV. was still in the height of his passion for Mademoiselle de la Vallière; but in the following year, the attractions of Madame de Montespan began to have effect, and in the year after, that brilliant and superb lady had completely dethroned her more lowly-spirited and retiring rival, and she reigned absolutely in her stead, and in the face of the Marquis de Montespan. When the children of this double adultery came into being, some remaining regard for decency in the king induced him to determine that they should be removed and brought up in private, and then it was that Madame de Montespan bethought her of that discreet lady of whom all spoke so well, and whom she had so effectually befriended.

Madame Scarron was then coquetting with thoughts of retiring again to a convent, as indeed she coquetted with such thoughts her whole life long, but she had not yet quite abandoned the world, and was by turns studying the book of Job and the Maxims of M. de Rochefoucauld. Madame Scarron was sounded on the subject in mysterious fashion—would she take care of some infants—parents great people, whose names could not be revealed? Madame Scarron, however, could make a shrewd guess, and consented, if the king himself would ask her to undertake the charge.

A lady of very austere principles might perhaps have had some scruples in undertaking the charge of the illegitimate offspring even of a king, and of carrying off each successive child as soon as born to her sequestered domicile. But Madame Scarron, pietist as she was, could well conciliate devotion with a due regard to worldly advantage, and, moreover, could she not fortify herself by the example of Madame Colbert, who had consented to bring up the two children of Louis XIV. and Madame de la Vallière?

At first, nevertheless, the arrangement was kept a profound secret. There were two children; each of them was placed in a separate house with a nurse. To avoid direct suspicion, Madame Scarron was not to live with them, nor to change her way of life, but she was to give them all her care. We can conceive the existence of the beautiful widow at this time, going in disguise on foot to the suburbs of Paris, to one house after the other, and carrying packets of linen, of food, and other articles under her arm; sometimes passing whole nights nursing a child; then returning to her own home in the morning by a back entrance; then dressing herself, and departing in a car-

riage from the front door to make her visits as usual at the Hôtels d'Albret or de Richelieu, in order to keep the same face to the world.

Her charges increased rapidly in number. Madame de Montespan had seven children in all by the king. As soon as each child was born, Madame Scarron was sent for, who, with masked features, carried off the infant in a wrapper or a scarf in a hired vehicle to Paris.

An agitated existence this for a grave discreet lady, to have to fulfil all the duties of the beau monde—to have to pay due attention to Madame de Sevigné, Madame de Lafayette, Madame de Coulanges, and all the great ladies and fine wits of the time, and to be diligent day after day, night after night, as head-nurse to all the little tenants of the little houses in the suburbs. In 1672, however, a change took place in the life of Madame Scarron. She was instructed to take a fine hôtel in the neighbourhood of Vaugirard, and to give herself up to the education of the children in secrecy and in retreat. Madame Scarron now for a season disappeared altogether from the world, and it was in this house of the Rue de Vaugirard that Louis XIV. first saw the lady who was destined by an astonishing caprice of fortune to be his wife. At first he could not endure her; “*Votre bel esprit,*” he styled her, in speaking of her to Madame de Montespan. However, as he was fond of his children, he was a constant visitor to the Rue de Vaugirard, and his prejudices against her wore away. Seeing what attention the widow devoted to her charges, he said, “*Elle sait bien aimer, et il y aurait du plaisir à être aimé d'elle.*” A letter of Madame Scarron's about this time proves, moreover, that the king was actually already paying strong attentions to the secluded governess; that the fine world of Paris and Versailles were indulging in floods of gossip respecting the nature of the retreat of the fair widow. “*Ce maître vient quelquefois chez moi, malgré moi, et s'en retourne désespéré, sans être rebuté.*”

The prudence of Madame Scarron, which never forsook her in life, did not desert her at this crisis; she sends away the king in a state of despair, it is true; but still, although he was a married man with a mistress, she contrives not to extinguish desire altogether.

After a year, however, there was no occasion for this life of secrecy. In the month of December, the letters of legitimisation of the Duc de Maine, the Count de Vexin, and Mademoiselle de Nantes, were verified by the Parliament of Paris, and the scandal was publicly avowed; and in 1674 Madame Scarron went to reside openly with the children at Versailles, and was received by the queen.

Madame Scarron was at this time forty years of age. The Court of Versailles was then in all its glory. Amid all the temptations which surrounded her, the conduct of the widow was modelled upon this maxim of her own, “*Il n'y a rien de plus habile qu'une conduite irréprochable.*” And her conduct was indeed immaculate, judged by the rule of a certain conventional religion and morality; but is there

no other? This at least is certain, that by a "conduite irréprochable" she managed to supplant her benefactress in the good graces of the king. Madame de Montespan, nevertheless, at the beginning of the residence of Madame Scarron at court, was enchanted to have so prudent, so clever, and so well-behaved a person constantly about her, and even after she began to perceive the attractions of her governess for her royal lover, submitted to the course of events with courage, and without too much jealousy. Indeed, the friendship at first between the two ladies was of the most intimate character. Madame de Montespan confessed every secret to Madame Scarron, and they remained for hours together in tête-à-tête each evening, in a manner to give jealousy to the king himself. However, subjects of heartburnings and discord could not fail to arise between two persons so delicately situated and so different in character. Yet before they broke out, the king had on two separate occasions made presents to Madame Scarron, amounting to two hundred thousand francs, with which she purchased the property of Maintenon, on the road to Chartres, at ten leagues from Versailles.

A life of perpetual gala and fête was that of the court of Louis XIV., which contained within it all that was distinguished and gorgeous within the limits of France; and at Fontainebleau, at Chambord, and afterwards at Versailles and Marly, lived a life of unending revelry. The king, for whom the society of his own plain and homely wife presented no charm, selected from the midst of this brilliant world a chosen few with whom to unbend. In the beginning of his reign the apartments of the Comtesse de Soissons, one of the nieces of Mazarin, was his favourite rendezvous, and the countess collected around her all the most eminent of the French and foreign nobility in France. Afterwards the charming Henriette d'Angleterre, the wife of monsieur his brother-in-law, fascinated him with her graces, and he held his little private court sometimes with her and sometimes with the Comtesse de Soissons. What a life of balls, comedies, hunting parties, cavalcades, promenades in carriages in the forest after supper till two or three o'clock in the morning, luncheon in a gilded galley on the great canal at Versailles to the sound of music on the waters, surrounded by the most beautiful women in France as ladies in waiting! Then ensued the brief passion for Mademoiselle de Vallière, whose apartments for a while received the king's private court, in which he first learned to admire the more dazzling glories of Madame de Montespan. Madame de Soissons fell into disgrace, and finally fled from France, more than suspected of having been an accomplice in the poisonings of La Voisin. Madame Henriette d'Angleterre died the sudden tragic death, the shock of which still thrills us as one of the finest orations funèbres of Bossuet. The gentle and timid La Vallière, after a faint struggle with the ascendancy of her haughtier rival, laid aside the state and gorgeous attire

of the duchess, and fled to the Carmelites, and passed away her life in midnight vigils, in sackcloth, in continual fastings, while the Grand Monarque and his Vashti-mistress were the centre of all honour and worship in the court.

A truly imperial beauty was this de Montespan, with her floods of blonde hair, her dazzling blue eyes, her deeply-arched eyebrows, her brilliant red and white complexion, and her splendid arms and hands and her voluptuous graces; and to all the graces of form she added a prompt wit, a lively imagination, and a spirit so caustic, that when she stood at her windows with the king the courtiers feared to pass under them—they called that *passer par les armes*, so piercing was her satire. To all this the Montespan united the attraction of infantine playfulness, toying with birds and pet animals like a child, to the diversion of the king. She had, too, as helpmates in her task of amusing the king, her two sisters, the Abbess of Fontevrault and Madame de Thianges, both of whom possessed an almost equal share of the wit and the graces of their family—the Montemarts, renowned for such qualities.

Such was the lady, and such the society, towards which Madame Scarron had, for a high-minded, scrupulous, and devout lady, to play a very delicate part—a part rendered infinitely more difficult by the caprices and wayward airs of the chief daughter of the Montemarts, the mistress of the king. Her favourite maxim, "*Il n'y a rien de plus habile qu'une conduite irréprochable*," has a greater value after one has become bosom friend of the mistress of the king and governess of her children. She lived at first retired with her little charges, clearing the ground we may say, gliding more and more by soft gradation into the intimacy of the king and his mistress, always, according to her own account, astonished at her progress, and wishing all the time for the strictest privacy and retirement. To believe her, she detested court life—*le pays*, as she called it, where she lived, but where the air seemed to agree with her passing well for somewhere about forty years.

A strange family existence that of these three persons—Louis XIV., Madame de Montespan, and Madame de Maintenon. The disputes between the two latter became constant; the education and treatment of the children were eternal topics for disagreement, not to mention that the mistress before long began to perceive that she had a veritable rival in the governess of her children. Madame de Maintenon contrived at length to interest the king in her disputes, and the great monarch said he had more trouble in keeping them on good terms than in settling the peace of Europe.

Had Madame de Maintenon any suspicion of the astonishing height of power which she was destined to reach? The question is impossible to answer. This is certain, that she unweariedly, and in the most dexterous manner, directed little moral hits both at the Montespan

and at the king, at the improper character of their relations, and so prepared the way for a separation. Madame de Montespan, to do her justice, took them very well. She had from time to time attacks of remorse, more especially when she was ill and weak, and of these the Maintenon always took advantage. "Come and see me," the mistress wrote to her, after the birth of a child; "but, above all, do not make a promenade over me with those black eyes of yours, which frighten me."

Madame de Maintenon, indeed, but came in aid of the exhortations of Bourdaloue and Bossuet at this time, and Madame de Montespan did precipitately, during the religious festival of Easter, retire from Versailles. The Grande Demoiselle de Montpensier, who had a tenderness for Madame de Montespan, went to see Madame de Maintenon to inquire if her friend was not coming back. "Elle se mit à rire et ne me répondit rien," she says in her "Mémoires." Does Mademoiselle de Montpensier report correctly? If so, this is the worst thing we know about Madame de Maintenon. Was this dismal agony of her benefactress such a laughing matter? "Elle se mit à rire et ne me répondit rien." Did so discreet and decent a lady ever go to such unseemly lengths? Alas! that laugh, if it really took place, was a touch of sincerity which is not to be found in her whole life.

Louis XIV., on his side, too, backed up by his bishops and confessors, and urged by the discreet smiles and approaches of the Maintenon, was now wholly resolved to break off so naughty a connection. He went away to his army without even seeing Madame de Montespan. Before he departed, he saw Bourdaloue, and he said to him, "Mon père, you ought to be content with me. Madame de Montespan is at Clagny." "Yes, sire," replied Bourdaloue; "but God would be more content if Clagny was at sixty leagues from Versailles." Madame de Montespan had, in fact, come from Paris to Clagny, which is not very far from Versailles.

This retirement of Madame de Montespan caused an unusual sensation among the court people. Madame de Sevigné and Bussy Rabutin hardly knew what to make of it. What was the part which Madame de Maintenon played in this affair?

It is said that at a review of the Mousquetaires, at which the king had expressed great satisfaction, she had the audacity to say, "Que feriez vous cependant, sire, si l'on vous disait qu'un de ces jeunes gens vit publiquement avec la femme d'un autre comme si elle était la sienne." Madame de Caylus, Madame de Maintenon's own niece, is the authority; and she says, "Le discours est certain." If Madame de Maintenon did make such a speech, it did not prevent her from writing to Madame de Montespan, after the taking of Ghent, "Le roi va revenir à vous comblé de gloire, et je prends une part infinie à votre joie!"

One can well conceive what impression a still handsome lady, with discreet and pleasant wit, playing the part of Minerva and Mentor at

once upon the king, might exercise in such a conjunction. Nevertheless, Madame de Montespan, alas! did return to court. Bossuet, while the king was still on his way back, had written a tender and imploring letter to him, deprecating the return of the favourite, and exhorting him to give his attention to the wretched condition of his provinces, "crushed beneath the disorders of the military and the abuses of the administration." And the king was exemplary in his devotions at Whitsuntide. Madame de Montespan, she, too, followed suit, in a milder way, and managed to content Bossuet. She found consolation in playing *hoca*,—a game of cards,—rather extravagantly at Saint Cloud. *Hoca*, and building, and a little divinity, and some respectful attentions to the queen, seemed at this time to fill up her existence. The queen and Madame de Montespan were for two hours on one occasion together in conference at the Carmelites, and both appeared equally content with each other. What was the subject of their conversation one would really like to know. Afterwards, the queen and Madame de Montespan were always together. The virtue of Madame de Montespan seemed on the point of rising to transcendent extremities. Madame de Sevigné thinks, if she can only stay where she is her "greatness will pierce the clouds." She admires her building fancies beyond measure,—“You cannot tell the triumph she enjoys in the credit of her workmen, who number twelve hundred. Alas! poor France! The palace of Apollidon and the garden of Armida are but the poorest of shadowings of what she is about. As for me, I think of Dido building Carthage when I think of her. The wife of her ‘substantial friend,’—the queen,—makes her visits, and all the royal family, one by one.” This effort of virtue on the part of Madame de Montespan was an immense success. Was it likely the king would remain long behind the rest in showing his admiration,—the more especially as the Maintenon was now far away with her young charge, the precarious little Duke de Maine, who had a lame leg, at the baths of Barèges, and the time of year was the sunny month of May. That Madame de Maintenon was inexpressibly anxious her letters show. She urges her friends to give her news. Still she had one consolation unknown to all: the king was in correspondence with herself.

Nevertheless his Majesty gave orders for his reception in July at Versailles,—and that the Montespan should be there to receive him.

As he approached Versailles, Bossuet and M. le Dauphin—Bossuet's pupil—met him with serious faces on the road to Versailles. The king noticed their mien, and said, “Say nothing. I have given orders for Madame de Montespan to have a lodging at the Château.” However, at first the king gave his word that he and the Montespan should remain on terms of Platonic friendship. And so indeed they did, apparently, for a time,—a time long enough to let Madame de Maintenon return; a time long enough to let winter go by; a time

long enough to let the king go again, campaigning in his heavy coaches, to Flanders, and to return therefrom in July, 1676. At the king's return the question then was, should Madame de Montespan remain or no at the court? It appears that Bossuet, even the grave Bossuet, was of opinion she might do so; but still it was thought wise (?) that there should be a preliminary meeting in private between the pair before they met in public, and this preliminary meeting, it was arranged, should take place in the presence of some of the most respectable and gravest ladies of the court. The king therefore paid a visit to Madame de Montespan; the grave ladies were there; the erring couple met in their presence. After a first greeting, however, the king drew the lady to the window. They talked a long time in a low voice; they shed tears, and then and there they both made profound bows to the most respectable and gravest ladies of the court, and retired to another room; from which retirement came, in course of time, says Madame de Caylus, the Duchess of Orleans and M. le Comte de Toulouse.

The next letter which we have of Madame de Maintenon, after this event, is written in a kind of rage. She accuses Bossuet of having been made a dupe, and of lacking the spirit of the court, as he no doubt did. "Why does not the Père La Chaise," she asks vehemently, "absolutely forbid the king the sacraments?" Jealousy and spite really ought not to be suspected as having tainted any letter of so Christian a lady as Madame de Maintenon.

This last liaison of the king with Madame de Montespan was by no means of so solid a character as before. The king had sundry fugitive passions, which gave his mistress some lively fits of jealousy and anger. We have an account of one of the scenes between the king and the lady, caused by a temporary attachment of the king to Mademoiselle de Fontanges (Diane);—

"Le roi eut hier une conversation fort vive avec Madame de Montespan. J'étais présente. Diane en fut le sujet. J'admirai la patience du roi et l'empirement de cette glorieuse. Tout finit par ces mots terribles: Je vous l'ai déjà dit, Madame, je ne veut pas être gêné. Madame de Montespan me demanda mes conseils. Je lui parle de Dieu, et elle me croit d'intelligence avec le roi: elle s'emporte contre la pauvre fille, contre le Père La Chaise, contre M. de Noailles. Elle passe des heures entières avec M. de Louvois et Madame de Thiangès. L'habitude lui a attaché le roi, je crains qu'il n'y revienne par pitié."

There are several noticable expressions in this letter. The epithet "glorieuse," applied to her benefactress, her speaking to her of God just in the way she would recommend her to take a cold bath, and je crains qu'il n'y revienne. However, Madame de Montespan began veritably, by this time, to be aware that her real rival was Madame de Maintenon herself; signs, indeed, of the high place which she held in royal favour began to be apparent to all. Boileau and Racine, who had been named jointly "historiographers" to the king, and read passages of their composition from time to time in the

room of Madame de Montespan, sometimes stayed to see the king and his mistress play cards. They observed that when Madame de Montespan gave utterance to some burst of humour, the king regarded Madame de Maintenon with a smile. On one occasion they found the king in bed, and Madame de Maintenon seated in a chair by the bedside. The king would sometimes pass two hours together in Madame de Maintenon's cabinet. At last came direct accusations and stormy scenes between Madame de Maintenon and the reigning mistress.

"Les bontés du roi ne me dédommagent point de la perte de ma tranquillité. Madame de Montespan veut absolument que je cherche à être sa maîtresse. Mais, lui ai-je dit, il en a donc trois? Oui, m'a-t-elle répondu; moi de nom, cette fille (la Fontanges) de fait, et vous de cœur. Je lui ai répondu en toute douceur qu'elle contait trop ses ressentiments. Elle m'a répondu qu'elle connaissait mes artifices, et qu'elle n'était malheureuse que pour n'avoir écouté ses ressentiments. Elle m'a reproché ses bienfaits, ses présents, ceux du roi, et ma dit qu'elle m'avait nourri et que je l'étouffais."

When matters had reached this pitch, it might be imagined that the two ladies could not meet together at any time on very pleasant terms. Nevertheless, Madame de Montespan, who, with all her caprice and fits of ill-humour, was at bottom extremely good-natured, managed to laugh at times with the stealthy Maintenon, and to get all the gaiety out of her which she could. Madame de Caylus reports, "that on one occasion when the court was on one of its usual journeys, and Madame de Montespan and Madame de Maintenon found themselves in the same carriage tête-à-tête, Madame de Montespan opened the conversation and said, 'Ne soyons pas les dupes de cette affaire-ci. Causons comme si nous n'avions rien à démêler; bien entendu que nous reprendrons nos démêlés au retour,'" and that Madame de Maintenon accepted the proposition, and both kept the compact. Madame de Maintenon writes herself that on another occasion she and the mistress "walked arm-and-arm together, laughing a good deal, but none the better friends for all that." Like the preux chevaliers of old, the ladies could suspend their warfare, pass a gay hour or two together, and then resume their fighting.

The king at last, however, found a way out of this life of eternal bickering and jealousy for Madame de Maintenon. M. le Dauphin was about to be married to the daughter of the Elector of Bavaria. The Dauphine must have a household, and the king named Madame de Maintenon second dame d'atours, creating the place especially for her. Adieu, Madame de Montespan!

However, Madame de Maintenon moralises again in a letter to her director, l'Abbé Gobelin, in her usual fashion,—"*Malgré l'envie que j'avais de me retirer, et malgré toute ma haine pour ce pays-ci, j'y suis attachée; c'est Dieu qui a conduit tout cela.*" It is pleasant always to think that "Dieu" thrust that greatness upon us, which our modesty and piety decline; and it was pleasant also for Madame de Maintenon to have so convenient a confessor as l'Abbé Gobelin,

who always replied to her threats of retreat,—“*Restez ! Dieu vous veut là !*” This was in 1680, and the queen did not die till 1683; during these three years the favour of Madame de Maintenon went on increasing, and Madame de Montespan’s ill-humour increased in proportion. Majesty now passed very frequently two hours in the Maintenon’s cabinet,—nay, even three hours when she had the migraine. Madame de Sevigné tells us that these conversations of Majesty with the *veuve Scarron* went on ever increasing, and became more and more beautiful—*ne font que croître et embellir*; each of them was seated in an arm-chair, and the Dauphine paid them visits from time to time. The lady now began to inspire fear and respect, and the ministers even to pay her court. The king appeared to take more and more pleasure in her steady power of self-possession and her reasonable way of treating all things;—he appeared to be “*charmed*.” The staid and prudent lady was now forty-five. Nevertheless, her equable temperament had various struggles and agitations. Witness a letter to a lady friend: “*J’obtiens tout, mais l’envie me le rend bien cher. Mon cœur est déchiré, le sien n’est pas de meilleur état. A quarante-cinq ans il n’est plus temps de plaire, mais la vertu est de tout âge. Priez Dieu pour moi, je ne fus jamais si agitée ni si combattue . . . Je le renvoie toujours affligé et jamais désespéré.*”

Not long after this letter, when the brilliant and fair Fontanges died at twenty years of age, and the king had ceased to see Madame de Montespan, except in public, the courtiers began,—*tout bas*,—to call Madame de Maintenon, Madame de Maintenant. And Madame de Maintenant passed every evening, from eight to ten, with his Majesty.

“*M. de Chamaraude*,”—first *maitre d’hôtel* of Madame la Dauphine,—says Madame de Sevigné, “*le mène et la remène à la face de l’univers.*” Signs of royal favour now, indeed, rained thick on the Maintenon. What was she, in fact? She was a sort of Platonic mistress of the king, and in such capacity had to set a high moral example. She took the unfortunate queen under her protection. In consequence of Madame de Maintenon’s manœuvres, the poor deserted lady met with greater attention than she had enjoyed during the whole time of her marriage. The retiring nature of the unfortunate queen was quite overcome with such unwonted attentions, and so unequal, from timidity, to receive unwonted favours from her Olympian lord, that Madame de Maintenon had sometimes to push her, all trembling, into the royal presence. However, the queen did not support long this unexpected display of conjugal affection; it was too much for her apparently, for she died suddenly in 1683. The king, it was thought, felt her loss severely, saying, “*Voilà le premier chagrin qu’elle m’ait jamais causé.*” Madame de Maintenon was with her mistress when she died, and after the death-bed scene was about to retire to her apartments, when the Duc de Rochefoucauld took her by the arm and drew her towards the king, saying, “*Ce n’est pas*

le temps, madame, de le quitter ; dans l'état où il est il a besoin de vous."

Did Madame de Maintenon now entertain design of absolute marriage with Olympian majesty itself ? Madame de Caylus tells us that during the journey of the court shortly after to Fontainebleau the agitation of the king's lady counsellor was extreme, and that from thenceforward she was always with the king ; she took part in all the journeys, travelling in the very carriage of his majesty, who never failed to visit Maintenon on his way to Chambord. Madame de Sevigné is astounded at her position. "*La place de Madame de Maintenon est unique en son genre ; il n'en a jamais eu, et il n'y en aura jamais de semblable.*"

The deserted Montespan still figured in a spectral way about the court, the king still appearing every day, for form's sake, for an instant or two in her apartment. The ex-mistress, for diversion and consolation, threw herself fervently upon devotion.

The exact date of the marriage of Madame de Maintenon with the king is unknown, but the fact is certain. It took place apparently about eighteen months or two years after the death of the queen, in the year 1685. The king was forty-seven, and Madame de Maintenon was the representative of fifty years of a conduite irréprochable ; but *la vertu est de tout âge*. The court, accustomed to see Madame de Maintenon so constantly with the king, at first observes no difference in their relations. When the marriage began to be suspected, various indeed were the ways in which it was regarded. By some it was received with admiration, by some with envy, by some with hopes of profit, and by some with profound astonishment and disgust. As for Saint-Simon, he speaks of it as "*l'humiliation la plus profonde, la plus publique, la plus durable, la plus inouïe, et que la postérité ne voudra pas croire, réservée par la fortune, pour n'oser ici nommer la Providence, au plus superbe des rois.*" Indeed, the contrast which destiny here offered to the world was astounding. Louis the Superb, —after his Mazarinettes, his De Soissons, his La Vallières, his Montespan, and his Fontanges, and a crowd of young and brilliant beauties,—had come to settle down in strict conjugal domesticity with a staid and serene elderly lady, three years older than himself.

Some rigorists, however, insisted still that a clandestine marriage was not sufficient to render the relations of the Maintenon with the king wholly without taint ; that consequently they still partook of the nature of a criminal attachment ; and some have asserted that Madame de Maintenon, after having by force of intrigue and cunning contrived to get the king to marry her privately, continued still the same manœuvres to get him to give the marriage publicity. As to this latter point, there is no doubt that there was a great deal of scheming and counter-scheming. According to Saint-Simon, the Maintenon had at one time prevailed upon the king to have the

marriage made public ; but Louvois, who had always sided with the Montespan, got wind of the project, went to Versailles, threw himself on his knees before the king and drew his sword, and implored his majesty to kill him on the spot rather than let him be witness of such an infamy befalling the royalty of France ; and that the king, troubled, embarrassed, and stammering, gave his word that the marriage should always be kept secret. It cannot be known how far Saint-Simon's account is true ; but this is sure, that before the marriage Louvois received the confidence of the king ; and on hearing it, threw himself at his feet with tears, and besought him not to dishonour himself by marrying the " *veuve Scarron*."

Saint-Simon believes also that a second attempt of the same kind was made by Madame de Maintenon, but was rendered abortive by the influence of Fénélon and Bossuet.

Nevertheless, Madame de Maintenon was addressed by a few of her intimate associates—four or five, perhaps—as "Your Majesty;" and the court paid to her on all sides was without limit, since it was well known what influence she had upon the royal counsels. This veiled kind of majesty, however, was in truth but a disguised servitude of the most painful and unavoidable character. Her chief occupation was to keep the king amused, or, as she expressed it, make "piety tasteful" to his majesty—"à faire goûter la piété au roi;" and without the help of cards and the lighter graces of the Montespan, to keep the king always amused, was a very serious undertaking. Louis XIV., to say the truth, had too much dignity of character to allow him to fall into the shameful excesses of a dishonoured old age, like that of his grandson, Louis XV. ; and after the irregularities of his early life he found a support and stay in the prudent wisdom of Madame de Maintenon, of which he knew how to make good use. Louis XIV. finished his career with Madame de Maintenon by his bed-side ; Louis XV. died very nearly in the arms of the Du Barry ; and the difference between the two death-beds is significative of the difference of the two epochs in which they happened.

One cannot, however, feel any kind of real sympathy with Madame Maintenon at any epoch of her life,—there is no real greatness, no real attraction about her ; secret contentment, secret delight, secret satisfactions of pride were the pleasures she aimed at having, and these she succeeded in obtaining. Her whole life was a sacrifice to this end, from the time of her marriage with the poor cripple Scarron. In her letters are to be found pictures from her own hand of her life at Versailles, which, as Sainte-Beuve says, almost make us pity her. From the hour of her rising to the hour of her going to bed she had no respite. She was obliged to be everything, not to the king alone, but to the princes also who had been her pupils, and to all the royal family in the palace. She was a veritable servant of all work, for Louis would not sacrifice the smallest of

his habits to make her more comfortable or put her more at her ease. Old as she was,—suffering from the cold in the vast apartments of Versailles and Fontainebleau, with huge doors and great windows on all sides of her,—she could not even put a screen round her chair to keep off the draughts, because the king never suffered from cold and liked symmetry in all things,—“*Il faut périr en symétrie,*” she writes. On one occasion, when she was ill in bed, suffering from a fever, the king arrived, and had the windows at once thrown open. He liked air.

The only consolation that Madame de Maintenon can draw from her discomfort is, that all this agrees very well with the health of the king. Sometimes, when she was ill, anxious, tired, and worn out, the king would enter her room, and she would have to exert herself to amuse and entertain him for hours together; after which she would say to her attendant, as she retired to rest and the curtains were drawn around her,—“*Je n’ai que le temps de vous dire que je n’en puis plus.*” If she allowed the king to see her troubles or discomforts she was afraid that he would think that devotion was the cause of it, and so take devotion as dislike. On one occasion, after an evening of severe exertion in supporting the ill-humour of the king, she said, “I was driven to the last gasp, but the king did not perceive it; now I will go and weep between my four curtains.” All the squabbles of the royal family, all the jealousies of the legitimate and illegitimate princes and princesses fell upon her shoulders. “*Je viens d’être tirée, non à quatre chevaux, mais à quatre princes.*” All difficulties of the royal household she was bound to settle in discreet fashion, and with a smiling face, however vexed at heart and tired in soul. Besides this, a mass of business matters were thrust upon her, especially those connected with church matters; for, says Saint-Simon, she thought herself the “*Abbesse universelle* ;” and in her own letters she styles herself “*la femme d’affaires des évêques.*” People aimed at making her the channel of every kind of demand and solicitation;—it was in vain for her to busy herself in secrecy and try and make herself inaccessible. “*En vérité, la tête est quelquefois prête à me tourner, et je crois que, si l’on ouvrit mon corps après ma mort, on trouverait mon cœur sec et tors comme celui de M. de Louvois.*”

On all affairs of state too she was obliged to keep herself informed, and have her opinions ready for the king; for every evening he transacted all his business with his ministers in her presence. Madame de Maintenon usually sat apart, occupied with reading or writing, or tapestry work. When on some difficult point, the king would say, “*Consultons la raison,*” then turn to the lady, and ask, “*Qu’en pense votre Solidité?*” *Votre Solidité*, indeed, was a name habitually employed by the king to Madame de Maintenon. He said to her, “we call Popes *votre Sainteté*, kings *votre Majesté*,—you, madame, must be called *votre Solidité.*”

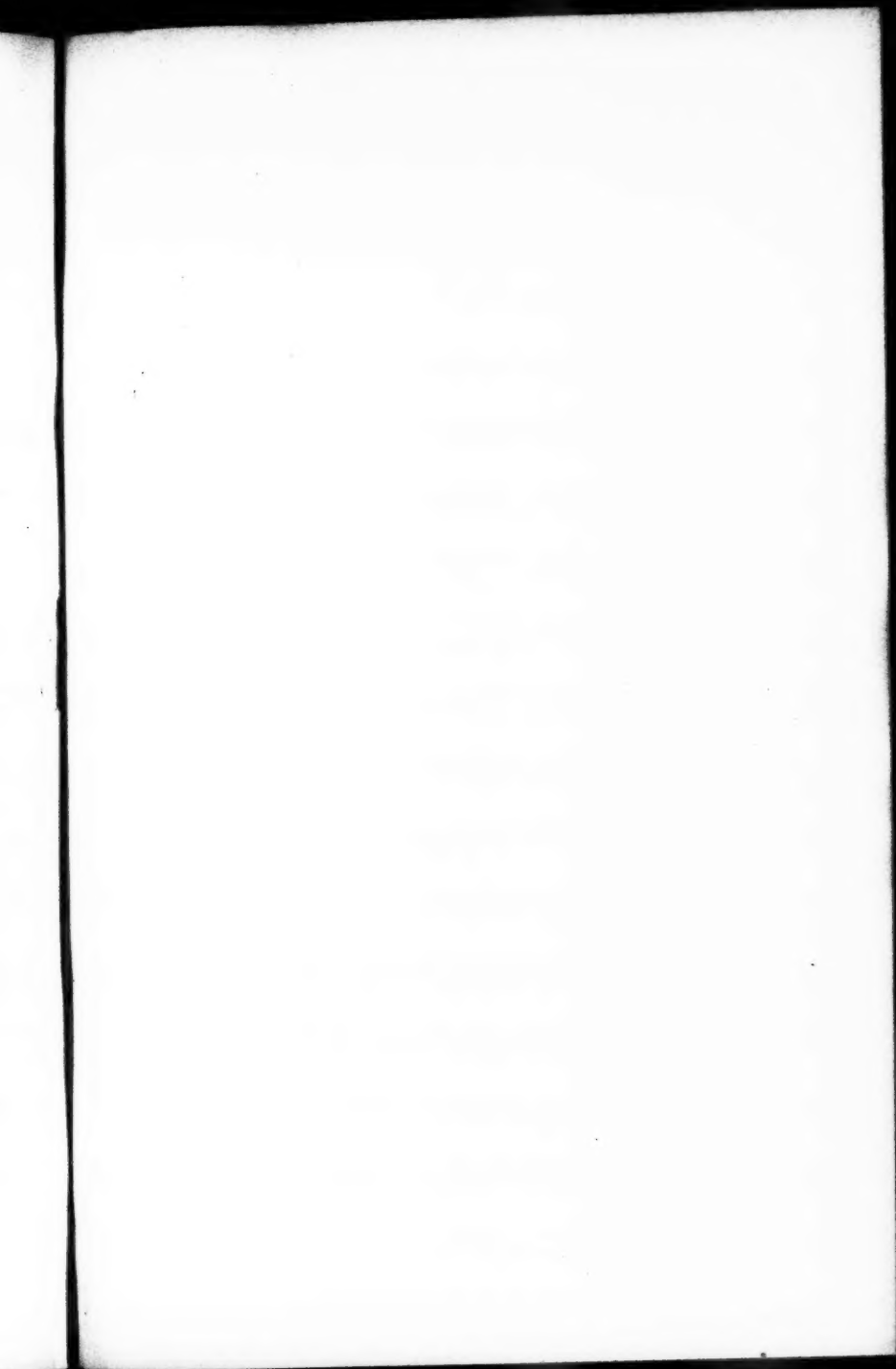
Amid the incessant torment and pain of such a life expressions escaped Madame de Maintenon at times indicative of the anguish she concealed beneath her smile. "J'en ai quelquefois," she remarked, "comme l'on dit, jusqu'à la gorge." And one day when she saw some little fish evidently ill at ease in one of the sumptuous basins of clear water at Versailles, she said, "Ils sont comme moi ; ils regrettent leur bourbe." "Oh ! dites-moi," she writes at another time, "si le sort de Jeanne Brindelette de Avon,"—a peasant girl,—"*n'est pas préférable au mien ?*"

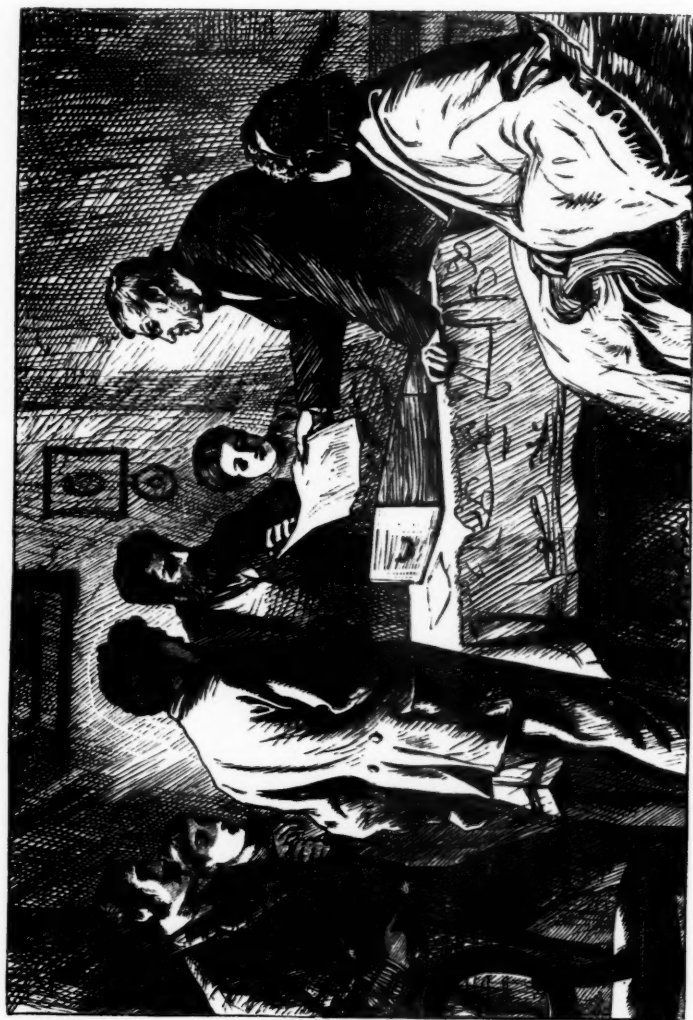
This kind of life she had to endure till she was eighty, when the king died. Did she love him ? The question is difficult to answer. At all events she did not wait to see the breath out of his body. As he was on his death-bed and his end evidently near, she consulted her confessor. "Vous pouvez partir," he said, "vous ne lui êtes plus nécessaire." "This conduct," says Sainte-Beuve, "for which she has been reproached, proves at least one thing, that in such instants of separation and eternal farewells, she would rather trust to the guidance of her confessor than take counsel of her heart."

After the king's death she retired to St. Cyr, where she died, in 1719, at the age of eighty-four.

To treat of her influence on public affairs, of her part, real or supposed, in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and other great events, would have taken us beyond our limits. The truth is, she initiated nothing, yet gave her countenance to all the senile follies of the concluding years of Louis XIV. How much of the intolerance of the declining years of the king can be traced to her cannot be surely known ; but she had a passion for converting Calvinist children to the Catholic faith, and spared no means to accomplish her purpose. She looked upon herself as a kind of demi-saint—a sort of mature Esther raised up by Providence to guide the great king into the paths of righteousness. When counselled to write her life, she excused herself from the task by saying it consisted wholly of "miraculous passages in her inner nature." "Il n'y a que les saints qui pourraient y prendre plaisir." The modesty of which expression must be patent to all. Michelet, a few words of whose sometimes reveals a character as with a flash of lightning, says of Madame de Maintenon, "*Sous son extérieur calculé de tenue de convenance son âme était très-âpre, comme on l'est volontiers, lorsque l'on a beaucoup pâti.*"

With one who,—as Michelet says,—had suffered much, one would not be too severe ; yet Madame de Maintenon had a consolation amid all her trials, and under the astonishing weight of earthly grandeur she had to endure,—her pride in the conviction that she was a secret saint and martyr as well as an unacknowledged queen. Job and the Maxims of M. de Rochefoucauld we know were at one time her favourite reading, and her chosen motto, "*Il n'y a rien de plus habile qu'une conduite irréprochable.*"





When he held up the paper to them they all crowded on each other to see.